The Lady with the Camellias

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THE PATHETIC STORY OF A COURTESAN WHO CONCEIVES A PURE PASSION; FOUNDED ON A TRUE STORY.

THE LADY WITH THE CAMELLIAS

(CAMILLE)

BY

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CHAPTER I.

I ALWAYS thought that an author, to create imaginary characters, ought to study mankind; just as one cannot learn a language without great application.

Not having yet reached the age when people can invent facts, I have to be satisfied with mere narrative.

The reader may be certain that this story, of which all the characters, with the exception of the heroine, are still alive, is founded on fact.

Moreover, there are in Paris people who were eye-witnesses to most of the events I am relating in this book, and who can testify to the truth, if my affirmation were not deemed sufficient.

Through a mere accident, I alone can write this story; for I alone have been the confidant of those final details, without which it would have been impossible to make it either interesting or complete.

How these details have been communicated to me the reader will learn further on. On the 12th of March, 1847, in passing through the Rue Laffitte, I observed a large yellow placard announcing a sale of furniture and costly curiosities, which had belonged to a person lately deceased. No name was mentioned. The sale was to take place at No.

9, Rue d'Antin, on the 16th instant, from twelve till five o'clock.

It was also stated that the rooms and the furniture could be seen on the 13th and 14th.

I have always been an amateur of curiosities, and I promised myself not to lose this opportunity, if not of buying, at least of examining some of the articles.

The next day I went to the Rue d'Antin.

It was still early, but there were already in the rooms gentlemen, and even ladies, who, although clad in velvet, wrapped up in costly shawls, and with elegant carriages waiting for them at the door, gazed with astonishment, and even with admiration, at the magnificence that was displayed.

After some time I understood the cause of this admiration and this astonishment; for having looked around, I soon perceived that I was in rooms which had belonged to one of the frail sisterhood. Now, if there be anything which ladies of fashion—and there were ladies of fashion in the rooms—are anxious to behold, it is the apartments of one of those demireps, whose equipages daily dash past their own, who, like them, have their box at the Opera, or at the "Théâtre Italien," and who display, when in Paris, in so insolent a manner their luxuriant beauty, their jewels, and their intrigues.

The person in whose rooms I now was was dead; therefore, the most virtuous women could visit them; for death had purified the air of this opulent sink of iniquity; and, besides, if needful, there was the excuse that they attended without being aware to whom the rooms had belonged. They had read the advertisements, and wished to see the things advertised and to make their choice beforehand. Nothing could be more simple;—but it did not prevent their seeking, amidst all this marvelous splendor, the mys-

terious traces of that private life of a courtesan, of whom they had heard, no doubt, such strange tales.

If any mystery had existed, it had unhappily died with the goddess of the temple; and, though these ladies would have liked it, they could only detect what was to be sold after she had died, and nothing of what might have been brought there whilst she was alive.

There were, however, plenty of purchases to be made. The furniture was superb. Nothing was wanting; there were articles in rosewood and buhl, Sèvres and China vases, small Dresden figures, satins, velvets and laces, etc.

I walked through the rooms, following the noble-born inquisitives who had preceded me. They entered an apartment decked with Persian hangings, and I was about to enter it also, when they almost immediately came out again, smiling as if they had been shocked by this last visit. This only increased my desire to go in. It was a dressing-room, replete with the smallest necessaries of a lady's toilet, and in which the prodigality of the deceased seemed to have reached its acme.

Upon a large table, placed against the wall—a table about six feet long and three feet wide—were exposed all the treasures of Aucoc and of Odiot. It was a magnificent collection, and not one of the many articles so necessary for the toilet of a woman like the one whose rooms we were inspecting was of a baser metal than silver or gold. Nevertheless, the collection, only made gradually, was not the gift of one lover.

As I am not shocked by looking at the dressing-room of a demirep, I amused myself in examining it in detail; and I discovered that the various articles, so magnificently chased, bore different initials and coats of arms.

Each of these presents seemed to represent a separate amour of this wretched girl, and I said to myself that

Heaven in its mercy had not allowed her to suffer the ordinary penalty of such a life, but had let her die in the midst of her luxury, while she still was in possession of her beauty, and before reaching old age, which is worse than death to a courtesan.

Indeed, what can be more melancholy to behold than vice in old age—above all, in a woman, who has not retained any self-respect, and inspires no interest. One of the saddest stories to listen to is the never-varying narrative of her repentance, not because she has gone astray, but because her calculations were ill-made, and the money she had made badly invested. I once knew an old woman who formerly had been a demirep, and to whom nothing remained of the past but a daughter, as beautiful as her mother had been, at least her mother's contemporaries said so. To this poor child her mother had never spoken as a mother should do, but had always told her that it was her duty to support her aged parent, who had kept her when she was a child. This unfortunate girl, who was called Louise, obedient to her mother's commands, sold herself without any inclination of her own, without any passion, without any pleasure, as she would have followed any other calling, had her mother taught her one.

This incessant prostitution, which she practiced though quite young, and which kept up the everlasting sickly condition of this girl, extinguished within her any sense of good or evil that Heaven might once have given her, but which no one ever thought of developing.

I shall never forget this young girl making her appearance upon the Boulevards, almost every day at the same hour, accompanied by her mother, who watched over her as carefully as an honest mother would accompanying her own daughter. I was then very young, and ready to accept the easy morality of the age; but I well remember that,

on beholding this disgusting surveillance, I felt shocked and horrified.

Moreover, the countenance of a virgin had never displayed more innocence, or a more melancholy expression of passive submission.

One might have said she was a statue of patient endurance.

One day the countenance of this girl wore quite a different expression. In the midst of the immoral life she led, and which the mother regulated, it appeared to the poor sinner that Heaven yet permitted her to be happy. Why, after all, should Providence, who had created her without any will of her own to cast off the painful burden of her life, leave her altogether without consolation? One day she discovered she was in the way to become a mother. The little womanhood that remained in her thrilled with joy. The soul finds strange refuges. Louise hastened to announce to her mother the discovery that made her so happy. I am ashamed to go on; but I am not inventing any anecdotes of immorality; I am telling an unvarnished tale, which perhaps it would be better not to publish, were it not that I believe it desirable, now and then, to describe the martyrdom of those beings who are condemned without a hearing, and despised without any inquiry. I am ashamed to tell it, but the mother replied to her daughter that they had barely money enough to keep two people, and that there certainly would not be sufficient for three; that such children are useless, and that her being "enceinte" was a loss of time!

Next day an old midwife, whom we will simply designate as a friend of the mother, paid a visit to Louise, who remained for some days in bed, and got up again paler and weaker than before.

About three months after, some one took pity on her,

and undertook her moral as well as her physical cure; but the last treatment had been too much for her, and Louise died in consequence of her miscarriage.

The mother still lives. How, heaven only knows!

This history came back to my mind whilst I stood looking at the silver fittings of a dressing-case;—and it seems that I must have been for some time buried in thought, for when I recovered myself there was nobody in the room but me and the man in charge, who watched me from the door, to see that I took nothing away.

I approached this worthy man, to whom I was evidently an object of great suspicion, and said:

"Can you tell me the name of the person who lived here?"

"Mademoiselle Marguerite Gautier."

I knew this girl by name, and had seen her.

"What!" exclaimed I, "is Marguerite Gautier dead?"

"Yes, sir."

"When did she die?"

"Three weeks ago, I believe."

"And why are all these articles on view?"

"The creditors think that it may benefit the sale. People can see, beforehand, the effect produced by the hangings and furniture, and you understand that induces them to buy."

"Oh! she had debts, then?"

"Not a few, sir."

"But the sale will bring in enough to pay these, no doubt?"

"It will bring in a good deal more."

"Who will get the surplus?"

"Her family."

"Had she a family?"

"So it appears."

"Thank you."

As the man was now convinced that I had no bad intentions, he bowed, and I left the rooms.

Poor girl! thought I, as I returned home, she must have died sadly enough; for in the world which she frequented friends only show themselves as long as a woman is in good health. And, in spite of myself, I bewailed the fate of Marguerite Gautier.

This may perhaps appear ridiculous to many; but I have an inexhaustible stock of forbearance for courtesans; and I do not trouble myself even to argue about this compassion.

One day, going to the prefecture for my passport, I saw in one of the neighboring streets a girl between two gendarmes. I do not know what she had done; but all I can say is that she shed bitter tears, while embracing a child, some few months old, from whom she was separated through being arrested. Since then I have not been able to despise any of these women whenever I chance to meet them.

CHAPTER II.

THE sale was fixed for the 16th.

One day had been left between the visiting days and the day of the sale, so that the upholsterers might take down the hangings, curtains, etc.

Just at that time I had returned from a journey, and, therefore, it was quite natural that I had not heard of the death of Marguerite, which is one of those pieces of news a man's friends always tell him when he returns to the capital of gossip. Marguerite was pretty; but though these women, when alive, make a great deal of noise, very little is heard of them after their death. They are suns which set as they rise, without shedding any light. When they die young, their death is known simultaneously to all their lovers; for in Paris, nearly all the lovers of such a woman live on a footing of intimacy with one another. Some few recollections of the deceased are exchanged in conversation, and then these gentlemen continue the even tenor of their life, without such an accident causing them to shed even a single tear.

Nowadays, when people are twenty-five, tears become so rare that they cannot be bestowed on the first comer. At most, relatives, who pay for it, are bewailed according to the sum of money they have left.

As to myself, although my initials were not on any of the articles of Marguerite's toilet-table, that instinctive indulgence, that innate feeling of pity, to which I have already pleaded guilty, caused me to think of her death much longer perhaps than it deserved.

I remembered having often met Marguerite in the Champs Elysées, in which she regularly drove every day, seated in an elegant brougham drawn by two superb bays, and even then to have remarked that she possessed an air of refinement very rare among girls of her class—a refinement which was still enhanced by her almost matchless beauty.

These poor girls when they go out are always accompanied by some person or other.

As no man willingly shows that he loves them, except when it is dark, and as they have a horror of solitude, they always take with them some woman, who, less fortunate than themselves, possesses no carriage; or some of those elderly belles who are elegantly dressed, though nobody knows why, and to whom gentlemen can address themselves without any hesitation when they wish to obtain some information about the lady such women accompany.

But Marguerite did not behave thus; she always came to the Champs Elysées alone in her carriage, in which she showed herself as little as possible, in winter wrapped in a large cashmere shawl, in summer dressed very quietly; and although she naturally met during her favorite drive many men whom she knew, if perchance she smiled on them, the smile was visible to them only, and a Duchess might have smiled thus.

She did not drive between the "rond-point" and the entrance of the Champs Elysées, as was and is the practice of ladies like her: her pair of horses bore her rapidly to the Bois. There she left her carriage, walked for about an hour, entered it once more, and returned home at full speed.

All these circumstances, of which I had often been a witness, recurred to me, and I regretted the death of this girl, just as one regrets a complete destruction of some fine work of art.

In fact, it was impossible to meet with a more perfect beauty than Marguerite had been.

Tall, and at the same time very slender, she possessed in a superlative degree the art of hiding this forgetfulness of nature by simply arranging the dress she wore. Her cashmere shawl, the point of which reached the ground, allowed to be seen the large flounces of a silk dress; and the thick muff which concealed her hands, and rested upon her chest, was surrounded by drapery so skilfully arranged that, however fastidious the beholder might be, he could not help being pleased by the general aspect.

Her head was charming, and a marvel in itself. It was very small, and De Musset would have said that her mother must have taken particular pains to shape it thus.

A pair of black eyes, surmounted by brows so perfectly arched that they seemed as if pencilled, shone in an oval countenance of indescribable charm. Imagine eyes with lashes so long that, when drooping, they cast a shadow on the rosy tint of her cheeks; a nose perfectly straight gave an intelligent expression to her face, while the nostrils slightly expanded by the ardent aspirations of a passionate temperament; a mouth regular in its form, with lips parted gracefully above teeth as white as milk; a complexion tinged with that velvety down which covers a peach that has never been touched; and you can form an idea of how that exquisite countenance looked.

Her hair as black as jet, and curling naturally or artificially, parted upon the forehead in two large bands, fastened at the back of her head, exposed the tips of her ears, in which sparkled two diamonds of the value of four or five thousand francs each.

How was it that the passionate life she led should have left Marguerite the virgin-like, nay, even child-like expression which characterized her countenance? We can

only say that it was so, but we do not pretend to understand it.

Marguerite had a beautiful portrait of herself, drawn by Vidal, the only artist whose crayon could have reproduced her countenance. Since her death, I have had that portrait, for some days, at my disposal, and its likeness is so perfect, that it has been of use to me in giving some details which otherwise might have slipped my memory.

I did not receive some of the particulars described in this chapter till later on; but I set them down now, so as to avoid the necessity of going back to them when the story of this woman shall be told.

Marguerite made it a point of going to all "first nights" at theatres, and passed nearly every evening either there or in the ball-room. Whenever a new piece was produced, she was sure to be present, with three things which she always carried with her, and which she placed in front of her box on the ground tier: her opera-glass, a packet of "bonbons," and a bouquet of camellias.

Generally these camellias were white, sometimes they were red; but no one knew why she chose them of different colors, and the "habitués" of the Paris theatres and her own friends had observed this as well as myself.

Marguerite was never known to have any other flowers than camellias, and eventually she came to be known at Madame Barjon's, the florist from whom she purchased these flowers, as "the lady with the camellias;" and that name stuck to her.

Moreover, I knew as well as others who moved in a certain circle in Paris, that Marguerite had been the mistress of some fashionable young men; that she admitted it openly, and that they prided themselves upon it, which proved that lovers and mistress were satisfied with each other.

However, for about three years past, after a visit to Bagnères, it was said that she lived exclusively with a foreign Duke of a certain age, who was very rich, and endeavored to keep her away, as much as possible, from her former acquaintances; and she appeared to yield to this willingly.

The following details were told to me about her intimacy with the Duke.

In the spring of 1842, Marguerite was so weak and so changed, that her physicians ordered her to take the waters of Bagnères; and she went there.

Among the patients at the baths was the daughter of the Duke whom we have mentioned, and not only was she suffering from the same disease as Marguerite, but she had also the same countenance, so that these two girls might have been taken for sisters. But the young Duchess was in the last stage of consumption, and died a few days after Marguerite's arrival.

One morning the Duke, who lingered at Bagnères, as one will linger around the spot where one's affections are buried, saw Marguerite in one of the walks.

It seemed to him that he had met the spirit of his child, and going up to Marguerite, he clasped her hands, embraced her with tears in his eyes, and, without asking who she was, implored permission to visit her, and to cherish her as the living image of his lost daughter.

Marguerite, who was alone at Bagnères with her maid, and was not afraid of being compromised, granted the Duke that permission.

There were, however, at Bagnères certain people who knew her, and who were officious enough to go and tell the Duke what Marguerite Gautier really was. This gave the old man a shock, for she was not like his daughter in this respect. But the warning came too late; the young girl's

society had become a necessity to him; it was his only inducement to continue to live.

He made no remark about her former life, for he had not the right to do so, but he asked her to change her present mode of living, if possible; and offered her in exchange for this sacrifice whatever she wished. She promised to do what he desired.

At the time we speak of, Marguerite, so impulsive by nature, was very ill; her past life appeared to her as one of the principal causes of her illness; and being rather superstitious, she hoped that Providence would leave to her her beauty and her health, in exchange for her repentance and reformation.

And in fact, the waters, walking, the exercise she took, and her going to bed at regular hours, had almost entirely cured her when the summer was nearly over.

The Duke accompanied her to Paris, where he continued to visit her daily, as he had done at Bagnères.

This "liaison," of which the true origin and nature were not understood by the public, produced a great sensation; for the Duke, who was well known to be immensely wealthy, now became notorious for his prodigality.

The public supposed this old nobleman to be a profligate —which is not unfrequently the case with rich old men— and hence his intimacy with the young girl. People imagined everything except the truth.

However, the feelings of this bereaved father towards Marguerite were so pure, that any other intimacy than that of mere affection would have seemed unnatural to him, and he never addressed to her a single word which his own daughter might not have heard.

It is far from my intention to make out our heroine anything else than what she really was. As long as she remained at Bagnères, the promise which she had made to

the Duke was not difficult to keep, and she kept it faithfully; but after her return to Paris, this young girl, accustomed to a life of dissipation—to balls, and even to orgies—seemed to think that solitude, only broken by the periodical visits of the Duke, would soon kill her with weariness; and the simoon of her former life passed over her head and her heart.

Add to this, that Marguerite had returned from her journey more beautiful than ever, that she was only twenty, and that her illness, dormant but not extinct, continued to awaken in her those feverish desires which are almost always produced by pulmonary affections.

The Duke felt it very much, when one day his friends, incessantly on the watch for anything that could disgrace this young woman, with whom he compromised himself, informed him, and proved to him, that at certain hours, when she was sure he would not visit her, she received other visitors, and that these persons sometimes stayed until the next morning.

When she was asked if this were true, Marguerite acknowledged that it was so, and advised the Duke, without any mental reservation, not to trouble himself any more about her, for that she was unable to keep the promise she had made him, and would no longer receive gifts from a man whom she had deceived.

The Duke remained a whole week without making his appearance; but he could not stay away any longer, and on the eighth day he came back, and asked Marguerite's permission to resume his visits, promising to take her as she was, provided only that he might continue to see her; he also pledged his word that he would never utter a single reproach, even if it should cost him his life.

Such was the state of affairs three months after the return of Marguerite from Bagnères; that is to say, about the month of November or December, 1842.

CHAPTER III.

On the 16th of March at one o'clock I went to the Rue d'Antin.

On entering the outer door the shouts of the auctioneer were plainly heard.

The rooms were crowded.

Among the crowd were, of course, all the "celebrities" of elegant vice, stealthily looked at by a few fashionable ladies, who had again availed themselves of the excuse of a public sale to have an opportunity of coming into close contact with females whom they could not meet on any other occasion and whose facile pleasures some of them, perhaps, envied in secret.

The Duchess of F—— stood side by side with Mademoiselle A——, one of the saddest examples of modern demireps; the Marchioness of J—— hesitated in buying a piece of furniture for which Madame D——, the most elegant and the most notoriously faithless wife of our day, was also bidding; the Duke of Y——, who is believed in Madrid to be ruining himself in Paris, and in Paris to be ruining himself in Madrid, and who, after all, does not even spend his income, while talking with Madame M——, one of our cleverest female novelists, who, now and then, is kind enough to write down what she says, and to sign what she writes, was exchanging confidential glances with Madame N——, that lovely frequenter of the Champs Elysées, where she almost always appears in either pink or

blue, with her carriage drawn by a pair of large black horses, bought at Tony's for ten thousand francs, and for which she paid ready cash; and, finally, Mademoiselle R——, who, by her mere talent, made twice as much money as great ladies receive as a dowry, and three times as much as others make by their amours, had come, in spite of the cold, to make some purchases, and she was as great an object of attention as any one in the room.

We could mention many more initials of people assembled in these rooms, and who were quite astonished to meet one another there, but we refrain for fear of wearying our readers.

I observed that every one was in a very merry mood, and though many who were present had known the departed, no one appeared even to remember that she had ever been in existence.

There was a great deal of boisterous laughter going on; the auctioneer bawled loud enough; the dealers who had secured the benches around the table endeavored, in vain, to obtain silence, for they "meant business." There never was an assembly more mixed or more noisy.

I moved about quietly amidst all this hubbub, and felt sad when I thought that it was taking place near the room where had so recently expired the poor creature whose furniture they were now selling off to pay her debts. Having come to look on rather than to buy anything, I noticed the faces of the tradesmen by whose orders the sale took place, and whose features brightened each time some article realized a higher price than they expected.

They were honest, those men, who had speculated upon the prostitution of this young woman, who had gained cent per cent by her, who had hunted her down with their legal notices during the last moments of her life, and who came after her death to reap the fruits of their honorable

calculations, as well as the interest for the disgraceful credit they had given.

The ancients were right in having but one and the same deity for tradesmen and thieves!

Dresses, shawls and jewelry were being sold with incredible rapidity. Nothing among all these things suited me, and I was standing by patiently.

Suddenly the auctioneer called out:

"A volume beautifully bound, with gilt edges, entitled, 'Manon Lescaut.' There is something written upon the first page. Who will bid ten francs for it?"

"Twelve!" said a voice, after a long pause.

"Fifteen!" said I.

I really do not know why I said this. No doubt on account of the "something written on the first page."

"Fifteen!" cried the auctioneer.

"Thirty!" exclaimed the original bidder, in a tone which seemed to defy competition.

It looked as if there was going to be some opposition.

"Thirty-five!" I shouted with the same tone of voice as my antagonist.

"Forty!"

"Fifty!"

"Sixty!"

"One hundred!"

I must admit that if I had tried to cause some sensation, I perfectly succeeded; for after I had made this bid there was perfect silence and everybody looked to know who the gentleman was who seemed so bent on getting hold of this volume.

The tone with which I pronounced this last bid appeared to have decided my antagonist, for he abandoned a contest which only had served to make me pay for this volume ten times more than it was worth; and, bowing to me, he was

polite enough to say, although it was rather late in the day,

"The book is yours, sir."

As nobody made another bid, I became the purchaser of the volume.

I was afraid that I would be obstinate enough to bid for something else, and then persist in buying it, which would certainly have drained my purse; and therefore I gave my address to the auctioneer's clerk, told him to keep the volume for me, and went away. No doubt, many people who witnessed this scene must have asked themselves why I paid one hundred francs for a book which I could have bought anywhere else for ten or fifteen francs at most.

About an hour afterwards I sent for my purchase.

Upon a blank leaf at the beginning of the volume was written in an elegant hand the following words—the dedication of the giver of the book—

"MANON TO MARGUERITE.
HUMILITY."

and this was signed "Armand Duval."

What was the meaning of this word "Humility?"

Had Manon recognized in Marguerite, according to the opinion of Monsieur Duval, a superiority of profligacy or of passion?

This second interpretation was the most probable, because the first was an impertinent truth, which Marguerite would never have tolerated, whatever she may have thought about herself.

I again went out, and forgot all about the book, but remembered it when I was going to bed.

Certainly "Manon Lescaut" is a touching narrative, of which I know every detail; and, nevertheless, whenever

I get hold of it, I feel my sympathy always revive; I open the book, and for the hundredth time I follow the adventures of the Abbé Prévost's heroine, who is so lifelike, that I seem actually to have known her. Through the exceptional purchase of the volume, the comparison between her and Marguerite gave it a fresh attraction. I perused it again, and my sympathy and pity became almost a feeling of affection for the poor girl, at whose sale I had bought this book. Manon had died in a desert, it is true, but in the arms of a man who loved her with his whole heart, and who, when she was dead, dug a grave for her with his own hands, bedewed it with his tears, and left his heart behind; whilst Marguerite, a sinner like Manon, and perhaps as repenting, died in the midst of splendor, if I could believe what I had seen, on the very bed in which she had passed many a night; but in the desert of the heart, far more arid, far more boundless, far more pitiless, than where Manon had been buried.

Marguerite, indeed, as some of her friends, who knew everything about her death, told me, had found no one to sit with her and console her during the two months her lingering illness lasted.

From Manon and from Marguerite my thoughts went back towards those women whom I knew, and whom I could see hurrying towards inevitable death with songs upon their lips.

Poor creatures! If it be wrong to love them, the least one can do is to pity them. We pity the blind, who have never seen the light of day; the deaf, who have never listened to the harmonies of nature; the dumb, who have never been able to give utterance to their heartfelt feelings; —and yet, through a sham pretense of prudery, we are not willing to pity that blindness of the heart, that deafness of the soul, that dumbness of the conscience, which madden

and benumb these unhappy creatures, and render them incapable of seeing what is good, of hearing the voice of God, and of speaking the pure language of love and faith.

Victor Hugo has created "Marion Delorme;" De Musset has called "Bernerette" into being; Dumas has described "Fernande." The thinkers and the poets of all times have brought to the courtesan the offering of their sympathy; and sometimes a large-hearted man has rehabilitated them by his love, and even has given them his name. If I insist upon this point, it is because among those who, perhaps, will read this book, many may be prepared to throw it aside, thinking that they will only find in it an apology for vice and for prostitution; and the author's years, no doubt, may contribute to this apprehension. Those who think so are mistaken; they can continue to read this book, if only this fear deters them.

I am honestly convinced of this principle: that to women to whom education has not taught what is right, Providence opens almost always two paths which lead to Him; those two paths are suffering and love. These paths are difficult to tread, and those who wander in them must be prepared to see their feet covered with blood, and their hands torn to pieces; but, at the same time, they leave on the thorns on the way the gewgaws of vice, and reach the goal in that state of nudity for which they need not blush before the Lord.

Those who meet such courageous female travellers are bound to assist them, and to declare openly that they have met them; for in making this fact known they point out the road to others.

But it does not do merely to put up, as it were, at the entrance of life two guide-posts, on one of which is written, "The road to what is right," and on the other, "The road to what is wrong," and then to say to those who present

themselves, "Choose!" We ought, as our Lord has done, to show the path which leads from the second road to the first to those who are being tempted on the way; and above all, we ought not to make the beginning of this path too difficult, or make it appear too inaccessible.

Christianity is before us, with its marvellous parable of the prodigal son, to teach us forbearance and clemency. Christ was full of love for souls wounded by human passions, whose wounds He loved to heal, applying to them the balm which was to cure them, and which was extracted from the wounds themselves. Thus He said of Mary Magdalene, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much,"—a sublimity of forgiveness which must have kindled a faith no less sublime!

Why should we be more severe than our Lord was? Why should we, in holding obstinately to the opinions of the world, which pretends to be harsh, that it may seem strong, why should we repulse those souls, often bleeding from wounds through which oozes the evil of their past life, like the bad blood of a diseased person, only waiting for the touch of a friendly hand to be healed?

I address myself to my own generation, to those for whom the theories of Voltaire happily no longer exist; to those who, like myself, are well aware that humanity, within the last fifteen years, has made one of its boldest forward strides. We know what is right and what is wrong; belief is springing up again, respect for holy things is restored to us; and if the world is not altogether as it ought to be, it is at least better than it was. The thoughts of all intelligent men tend to the same end, and all great minds are united in the same principle: "Let us be virtuous! let us be young; let us be truthful! Evil is vanity; let us have the pride of virtue; and, above all, let us not despair; let us not despise the woman who is neither

a mother, a daughter, nor a wife; let us not esteem our family alone; let us not reduce our forbearance to mere egotism, since 'joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance;' let us endeavor to create such rejoicing on high, for Heaven will render it to us again tenfold; let us leave upon the road the alms of our clemency for those whom earthly desires have led astray, but who will be saved, perhaps, by the expectation of a better world; and, as old women say, when they advise a man to take some medicine which they have concocted, 'If it does not do any good, it cannot do any harm."

Certainly it must appear very bold that I should wish to draw such grand results from the unimportant subject I am writing about; but I am one of those men who believe that the smallest thing contains the germ of the greatest. The infant is small, and yet the man is contained therein; the brain is confined, and yet thought dwells in it; the eye is but a point, yet it grasps a large space.

CHAPTER IV.

THE sale lasted two days, and produced a hundred and fifty thousand francs.

Two-thirds of this went to the creditors, and the remainder to Marguerite's relatives—her sister and her nephew.

When the notary wrote to the sister that Marguerite had left her fifty thousand francs she must have been rather astonished.

It was six or seven years since that sister had seen Marguerite, who left her home on a certain day and had never communicated, either direct or indirect, any particulars of her life from the time she had disappeared.

The friends of Marguerite were very much astonished when they saw that her only sister was a buxom fine-looking country lass, who, until then, had never left her native village.

She found herself wealthy all at once, without knowing even from what source this unexpected fortune had come to her.

I have been told that she returned quickly to the country, very sad for her sister's death; but, nevertheless, somewhat consoled by investing her money in the four-and-a-half per cents.

All these facts were reported in Paris—that great city that originates every kind of scandal—and they had begun to be forgotten. I also had almost ceased to think about the little share I had had in the matter when a

fresh incident made me acquainted with the entire history of Marguerite, and with details so touching that they inspired me with a desire to write this narrative; and that is why I have written it.

The rooms in which she had formerly lived were empty, and had been to let for three or four days, when one morning there was a ring at the door of my rooms.

My servant, or rather the "portier," who acted as my servant, opened the door, returned with a visiting card, and informed me that the gentleman who had handed it to him wished to speak to me.

I glanced at the card and read the name:

"Armand Duval."

I tried to remember where I had seen that name before, and I recollected that it was written on the fly-leaf of the novel "Manon Lescaut."

What could the gentleman, who had given this book to Marguerite, want with me? I told the servant to show him in immediately.

A young man entered, fair, tall, and very pale, dressed in a travelling costume, which he seemed not to have changed for some days, nor even to have taken the trouble of brushing it since he arrived in Paris, for it was covered with dust.

Monsieur Duval was greatly moved, and made no effort to conceal it; it was with tears in his eyes, and with a trembling voice, that he said to me, "Sir, I hope you will excuse my visit and my dress. Young men make no compliments with one another; moreover, I was so anxious to see you this very day that I have not even taken the time to go to the hotel, where I sent my trunks, but have come directly to you for fear that you might be out, notwithstanding it being so early."

I begged Monsieur Duval to sit down near the fire; and

he did so, while taking out his pocket handkerchief which he pressed to his face.

"You must be at a loss to understand," he remarked, smiling sadly, "what such an unknown visitor as I am can be wanting of you at this hour, in such a dress, and shedding tears, as he does. I come, in short, to ask you to render me a great service."

"Pray speak, sir; I am wholly at your disposal."

"Were you present when Marguerite Gautier's goods were sold?"

On asking this question, the young man could no longer suppress his emotion, and was obliged to shed tears in spite of himself.

"I am sure I must appear very ridiculous to you," he added; "pray excuse me, and believe me that I shall never forget the patience with which you have been kind enough to listen to me."

"Sir," I replied, "if the service which I appear to be able to render to you can soothe, more or less, your sorrow, tell me as quickly as possible in what way I can be of any use to you, and I shall be most happy to do anything I can."

The sorrow of the young man affected me, and involuntarily I should have liked to befriend him.

He asked me:

"You bought something at Marguerite Gautier's sale?"

"Yes, sir, a single volume."

"Manon Lescaut?"

"Precisely."

"Is that book still in your possession?"

"It is in my bedroom."

When he heard that I still had that work he appeared much relieved, and thanked me, as though I had already begun to render him a service by keeping it.

I got up, went into my bedroom to fetch the book, and handed it to him.

"This is indeed the very volume," and some big tears fell upon its pages.

"May I ask, sir," looking steadfastly at me, and in vain endeavoring to conceal that he had been weeping, and was ready to weep again, "may I ask if you attach any value to this book?"

"Why do you ask, sir?"

"Because I have come here to beg you to let me have it."

"Pardon my curiosity," I said, "but did you give the book to Marguerite Gautier?"

"I did."

"The book is yours, sir, take it; I am happy to be able to return it to you."

"But," replied Monsieur Duval, with some embarrassment, "the least thing I can do is to repay you the sum you paid for it."

"Allow me to beg your acceptance of it. The price of a volume at such a sale is a mere trifle, and I do not remember how much I gave for it."

"You paid one hundred francs for it."

"That is true," I said, embarrassed in my turn. "But how do you know?"

"That was not very difficult to find out. I expected to be in Paris in time for the sale, but I only arrived this morning; I was anxious to get something or other which had belonged to Marguerite, and I hastened to the auctioneer and asked his permission to look over the list of articles sold, and the purchasers' names. I then saw that you had bought this book, and I resolved to entreat you to let me have it, although the price which you paid for it made me fear that you yourself wished to remember her, and had, therefore, bought this volume."

Whilst saying these words, Armand was evidently impressed with the idea that I had known Marguerite in the same way that he had known her.

I hastened to disabuse him. "I only knew Mademoiselle Gautier by sight," I said; "her death impressed me as the death of a pretty woman always impresses a young man who was pleased now and then when he saw her. I wished to buy something at the sale; and I do not know why I persisted in bidding for this volume, except for the satisfaction of annoying a gentleman who was also eagerly bidding for it, and who seemed to defy me to get it. I repeat, therefore, sir, that this book is entirely at your disposal, and I again beg you will accept it, not as if I were an auctioneer, but in order that our acquaintance may last longer, and become more intimate."

"I thank you, sir," said Armand, offering me his hand and clasping mine. "I accept your offer, and shall be grateful to you as long as I live."

I should have liked to have questioned Armand about Marguerite and the dedication of the book, the journey which the young man had made, and why he was so anxious to possess this volume, for it excited my curiosity; but I feared that my visitor would think that I had only refused his money to have the right of questioning him and of interfering in his affairs.

It appeared that he guessed what I wished to know, for he asked me—

"Have you read this volume?"

"Throughout," was the answer.

"What did you think of the two lines written by me at the beginning?"

"I saw at once that in your eyes this poor girl to whom you had given that volume was removed from the ordinary category of her class; for I did not imagine that you wished

to express in those few words a commonplace compliment."

"You are right, sir; that girl was an angel. Read this letter," he said.

And he handed me a letter which had evidently been perused innumerable times.

I opened it, and read as follows:—

"My Dear Armand,—I have received your letter; you are still as kind as ever, and I thank Heaven for it. Yes, my friend, I am ill indeed, and I cannot be cured; but the interest which you still take in me greatly diminishes my sufferings. I doubt if I shall live long enough to have the happiness of again pressing the hand that wrote the kind letter I have just received, and which would cure me, if anything could do so. I shall not see you again, for I am dying, and hundreds of leagues separate you from me. My poor friend! your Marguerite of former days is very much changed, and it is perhaps better that you should not see her again, than see her as she is now. You ask me if I forgive you? With all my heart I do so, my friend; for the harm you wished to do me was but a proof of the love which you felt for me. I have been confined to my bed for a month, and I care so much for your good opinion, that I every day write in my diary what has happened from the time we parted until the moment when I shall no longer have the strength to write any more.

"If you really feel any interest in me, Armand, call when you return on Julie Duprat, who will hand you my diary. You will then learn the reason and the excuse for my behavior towards you. Julie has been very kind to me; we often talk about you when we are together. She was with me when your letter arrived, and we both wept over it.

"In case I do not hear from you again, she has prom-

ised me to let you have these papers on your return. Do not thank me for sending you this daily contemplation of myself. It does me a great deal of good, and forms the only happy moment of my life. If you discover, on reading these pages, an excuse for my past conduct, I find in writing them a continual relief to my feelings.

"I should like to leave you some trifle which would recall me for ever to your mind; but everything is seized in my rooms, and nothing belongs to me.

"Can you imagine my feelings, my friend? I am about to die, and from my bedroom I hear the very men walking about in the drawing-room whom my creditors have placed there, in order to see that nothing is removed, and that nothing remains to me, if I should happen not to die. I hope they will wait till all is over before beginning the sale.

"Men are pitiless!—or, rather, I deceive myself; it is Heaven which is just and inflexible!

"Dearly beloved, you will come to the sale, and you will buy something there; for if I were to put the smallest thing aside for you it might be discovered, and these people would be capable of prosecuting you for taking away goods that have been seized.

"It is a sad life which I am about to quit!

"How kind Providence would be if it allowed me to behold you once more before I die! But, according to all probability, I have to bid you adieu, my friend. Pardon my not finishing this letter, but the gentlemen who promised to cure me have exhausted me by bleeding, and my hand is unable to write any more.

"MARGUERITE GAUTIER."

In fact, the last words were scarcely legible.

I returned the letter to Armand, who had been conning

it over again mentally while I was perusing it; for as he took it he said to me:

"Who could ever have believed that it was a demirep who wrote these words?" and again, overcome by his recollections, he looked for some time at the letter, and at length pressed it to his lips.

"And when I think," he resumed, "that she died without my being able to see her, and that I shall never see her again—when I think that she has done for me more than a sister would have done—I cannot forgive myself for having left her to die thus. She died whilst thinking of me, whilst she was writing to me and uttering my name. Poor, dear Marguerite!"

And Armand, expressing these thoughts aloud, and shedding tears, gave me his hand and continued:

"People would consider me very childish if they saw me bewail the death of such a girl as Marguerite was, but they do not know what I made her suffer; how cruel I have been to her, and how kind and submissive she has been. I fancied that I should have to forgive her, and at this present moment I find myself unworthy of the pardon which she grants me. I would give ten years of my life to shed tears for one hour at her feet."

It is always difficult to soothe a grief of which the cause is unknown to you; however, I felt so much sympathy for this young man who so frankly made me the confidant of his sorrows, that I thought I had better say a few words to him, and I asked him:

"Have you no relatives, no friends? Do not despair; go and see them, and they will console you, for I can only pity you."

"You are right," he said, getting up from his chair and walking up and down the room. "I weary you; forgive me for not remembering that my grief can be of little

consequence to you, and that I am troubling you with a matter which can have no interest for you."

"You entirely misconstrue the meaning of my words; I would gladly serve you, and I only regret my inability to allay your sorrows. If my company and that of my friends can divert your thoughts—if, in short, you have need of me in any way whatever, be assured that I shall be delighted to be of use to you."

"Forgive me," he replied; "grief exaggerates my sensations; allow me to remain here a few minutes longer, to dry my tears, so that the idlers in the street may not look as a curiosity upon the big lout who is weeping. You have made me very happy by giving me this volume; I shall never know how to be grateful enough for what you have done for me."

"You will be grateful enough if you will grant me your friendship," I said to Armand, "and if you will tell me the cause of your grief. People are consoled by relating their sufferings."

"You are right; but to-day my tears prevent me, and I could only utter incoherent words. Another day I will tell you my history, and you shall judge whether I am right in mourning for this poor girl. And now," he added, wiping his eyes once more and looking at himself in the glass, "let me hear you say that you have not thought me too foolish, and permit me to come and see you again."

The young man looked so amiable and gentle that I was almost going to embrace him.

Tears came again in his eyes, and as I looked at him he turned away his head.

"Do not despair, my friend," said I.

He bade me farewell.

Then, doing his utmost to prevent his shedding any more tears, he left my rooms as quickly as possible.

I raised my window curtains and saw him enter a cab which was waiting at the door; but hardly had he taken his seat than he burst once more into tears and buried his face in his handkerchief.

CHAPTER V.

I HEARD nothing more of Armand for a considerable time; but, on the other hand, Marguerite was very frequently the subject of conversation.

You may have observed that if a person's name who apparently was going to remain unknown or at any rate was indifferent to you, be once pronounced in your presence, certain details commence to crop up, and suddenly all your friends will talk about him of whom they have never spoken before. Then you will learn that you have almost been brought into contact with that person, who many times crossed your path without being observed, and you will discover in the events that are told you a coincidence, an actual affinity with certain events of your own life. I was not exactly in this position with regard to Marguerite, as I had seen her, met her, knew her by sight, and also knew her daily habits. Nevertheless, since that sale, her name was dinned so often in my ears, and in the visit mentioned in the previous chapter that name had been pronounced by Armand with so heartfelt an emotion that I became more and more astonished, whilst my curiosity was aroused.

Hence whenever I met an acquaintance to whom I had never before mentioned Marguerite's name I asked him:

"Did you know Marguerite Gautier?"

"The 'Lady with the Camellias?'"

"The very same."

"Oh, quite well!"

This "quite well" was in many cases accompanied by a smile which was meant to be very expressive.

"Well, what sort of a girl was she?" I continued.

"A very kind-hearted girl."

"Is that all you know about her?"

"Good Heavens, yes! She was, perhaps, more intelligent and had more feeling than other girls of her class."

"Do you know anything particular about her?"

"Yes, she ruined the Baron de G——."

"Only that?"

"She has been the mistress of the old Duke of B——."

"Was she, indeed, his mistress?"

"People say so. He gave her a good deal of money."

I always heard the same story.

However, I was anxious to learn something about the "liaison" between Marguerite and Armand.

One day I met a gentleman who was intimately acquainted with many of those women, and I asked him if he had ever known Marguerite. He replied:

"Quite well."

"What sort of a girl was she?"

"A very handsome and a very kind-hearted girl. I was sorry to hear that she was dead."

"Was her lover not a certain Armand Duval?"

"A tall, fair young man?"

"The same."

"Yes."

"Who was this Armand?"

"A young man who spent with her the little money he had, I imagine, and then was obliged to leave her. People say he was madly in love with her."

"And she?"

"They also say that she was very much attached to

him, but as such girls are attached. One must not expect from them more than they can give."

"What has become of Armand?"

"I do not know. I was very slightly acquainted with him. He lived for five or six months with Marguerite in the country; but, when she returned to Paris, he went away."

"You have not seen him since?"

"Never."

Neither had I seen Armand again. I began to ask myself whether at the time of his visit to me, when he had just heard of Marguerite's death, his former love for her had not become somewhat exaggerated, and his grief as well; and I said to myself that he had perhaps already forgotten the young woman who was dead, and the promise he had made to come and pay me another visit.

This supposition would have appeared probable enough in the case of any other person; but in the grief of Armand there was such an accent of sincerity that, going to the other extreme, I fancied that his sorrow might have made him ill, and that the reason why I had not heard from him was that he was ill, and perhaps dead.

I could not help feeling an interest in this young man. Perhaps there was a dash of selfishness in this interest; perhaps I thought that underneath this grief there was a sad story of wounded affections; and, finally, perhaps my desire to learn that story had much to do with the anxiety I felt about not hearing from Armand.

As Monsieur Duval had not come back to me, I resolved to pay him a visit. It was not difficult to find a pretext; but unfortunately I did not know his address, and no one among all those whom I asked could tell me where he lived.

I went to the Rue d'Antin and thought perhaps the

"portier" might know Armand's address, but there was a new "portier," and he knew no more about it than I did. I then asked him where Marguerite had been buried, and heard that it was at the cemetery of Montmartre.

It was the beginning of April. The weather was fine, and the graves would no longer look as desolate as during winter. In fact, it was warm enough for the living to remember the dead and pay them a visit. I went to the cemetery saying to myself that a single glance at the grave would show me whether the grief of Armand still lasted, and would tell me, perhaps, what had become of him.

I entered the keeper's lodge and asked him if on the 22d of February a female named Marguerite Gautier had been buried in that cemetery.

He turned over the leaves of a big book, in which were inscribed and numbered the names of all those who took up their last abode there, and informed me that, in truth, on the 22d of February at noon a young woman of that name had been interred there.

I asked him to show me her grave, for there is no means of finding, without a guide, one's way in the city of the dead, which has its streets like the cities of the living. The keeper summoned the gardener, to whom he gave some orders, but who interrupted him by saying, "I know, I know;" and then turning towards me observed: "the grave is easy to be recognized."

"Why so?" I asked.

"Because there are flowers on it, quite different from any other grave."

"Do you take care of these flowers?"

"Yes, sir. I wish all relatives took such care of the dead as the young gentleman does, who especially ordered me to look after that new grave."

After a few turns the gardener paused, saying, "Here it is."

Before me was a little plot of flowers which one would never have supposed to be a grave, if a white marble tablet had not borne Marguerite's name.

This marble tablet was set up vertically, whilst an iron railing enclosed the ground, covered with white camellias.

"What do you say to that?" the gardener asked.

"It is very beautiful."

"And every time a camellia fades, I have orders to replace it."

"Who gave you this order?"

"A young gentleman who shed a good many tears the first time he came. A former lover of the deceased, no doubt, for it appears she was a fast young woman, and people say she had been very pretty. Did you know her, sir?"

"Yes."

"As well as the other gentleman?" asked the gardener, with a significant smile.

"No, I have never even spoken to her."

"And yet you come here to see her! Well, that is kind of you, for those who come to visit the poor thing do not crowd the cemetery."

"No one comes here, then?"

"Not a soul, except that young gentleman who came once."

"Only once?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he has never come again since?"

"No; but he will when he comes back."

"He has gone on a journey, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know where he has gone to?"

"I believe he has gone to see Mademoiselle Gautier's sister."

"Why has he gone there?"

"To ask her permission to have the body taken up again and to have it buried somewhere else."

"Why should he not leave her here?"

"You know, sir, that people have strange ideas about the dead. We see that every day. This grave has been bought only for five years, and the young gentleman wishes to have a grave for her in perpetuity, and a larger plot of ground as well. It will be much finer in the new part of the cemetery."

"What do you call the new part of the cemetery?"

"The new graves that are now for sale on the left. If this cemetery had always been managed as it is now there would not be one in the world to compare with it. But there is a good deal to do yet before it is as it should be. Moreover, people have their fancies."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, I mean that there are people who are proud even here. It appears that this Mademoiselle Gautier led rather a fast life; I beg your pardon for saying it. Now the poor thing is dead, and there remains just as much of her as of those against whom there is nothing to say, and whose graves we water every day. Well, when the friends of those who are buried by the side of Mademoiselle Gautier heard what she had been, they got it into their heads to object to her being here; and they said that such kind of women ought to be buried in a place by themselves, just as paupers are! Did you ever hear anything like it? I gave a bit of my mind to these sleek citizens—who do not come here four times a year to see their dead, and who bring their own flowers with them, and such flowers!—who grudge the expense of keeping up the graves of those for

whom they pretend to weep; who have carved on their tombs regrets they never felt, and who now come to raise difficulties about who lies in the vicinity of their relatives. You can believe me or not, sir; I did not know this young girl, and I do not know what she has done. Well, I like her, the poor little thing; and I take care of her, and I provide her with camellias at the lowest price. She is my favorite. We gardeners of cemeteries are compelled almost to love the dead, for we are so busy that we hardly have any time to love anybody else."

I looked at this fellow, and my readers will understand, without my entering into details, with what emotion I listened to him.

He probably perceived it, for he continued:

"They say that many people have ruined themselves for that girl, and that she had lovers who adored her! Well, it seems odd and pitiful, but not one of them ever comes here to see her, nor even to buy her a single flower. Yet she has no reason to complain, for she has some one to remember her, and he does as much for her as all the others would do. But we have girls here of the same class and of about the same age; and I feel it when I see their poor bodies thrown into the grave, and not a single soul caring for them when once they are dead. Our business is not always agreeable, especially if we have any heart or feeling left. I cannot help it, it is not my fault; I have a fine handsome daughter at home who is about twenty; and sometimes when they bring here a dead girl of her own age, whether it be a fine lady or a poor wanderer, I cannot help feeling for her.

"But I weary you with my talk, and it is not to listen to me that you have come here. I was told to show you the grave of Mademoiselle Gautier. There it is. Can I do anything else for you?"

"Do you know the address of Monsieur Armand Duval?"

"Yes, sir; he lives in —— Street, at least I go there to get paid for those flowers."

"Thank you, my friend."

I cast a last look upon this grave covered with flowers, and, in spite of myself, should have liked to have penetrated to the bottom to see what change had been produced in this beautiful creature who was buried there; and then I walked away full of thought.

"Should you like to see Monsieur Duval?" said the gardener, who walked beside me.

"Yes."

"I am sure he has not come back, for, otherwise, we should have seen him here."

"You are quite sure, then, that he has not forgotten Marguerite?"

"I am quite sure of it. I am convinced that his anxiety to have the grave changed is only because he wants to see her once more."

"How so?"

"The first words he said to me when he entered the cemetery were to ask what he could do to see her again. That could only be managed by changing her grave, and I gave him all the necessary information for getting the permission for this alteration. You see, in order to remove the dead from one tomb to another, it is necessary to get the sanction of the family, who alone can authorize such a removal, which must take place in the presence of a commissary of police. Now, Monsieur Duval has gone to Marguerite Gautier's sister to obtain her sanction, and therefore his first visit on his return will certainly be to our place."

We had reached the gates of the cemetery. I thanked

the gardener anew, and handed him some small coins; then I went to the address he had given me.

Armand had not yet returned.

I left a note for him, in which I asked him to come and see me as soon as possible, or to let me know where I could find him.

Two days afterwards, early in the morning, I received a reply from Monsieur Duval, in which he informed me that he had come back, and begged me to call on him, as he was completely worn out and quite unable to leave the house.

CHAPTER VI.

I FOUND Armand in bed.

On seeing me, he held out his hand, which was very hot.

"You are feverish," I said.

"That is nothing; it is only the fatigue of a quick journey."

"You have been to Marguerite's sister?"

"Yes; but how did you know that?"

"I know it. Did you get the permission you wanted?"

"Yes; but who told you that I had gone there, and why I went there?"

"The gardener of the cemetery."

"Have you seen the grave?"

I hardly dared to answer; for the tone of his voice showed that the young man was still a prey to the emotion which I had witnessed, and that every time his thoughts or the words of others led to this painful subject, his feelings would overpower him involuntarily for a long time yet.

I contented myself, therefore, with replying by a mere nod of the head.

"Has he taken care of it?" asked Armand.

Some big tears rolled down the cheeks of the invalid, who turned away his head to hide them. I pretended not to have seen them, and endeavored to change the conversation.

"It is three weeks since you left," said I.

Armand passed his hands over his eyes, and replied:

"Yes, just three weeks."

"You have had a long journey?"

"I have not been travelling all the time; I was ill, or I should have returned long since. Hardly had I arrived at the place where Marguerite's sister lived, when I got an attack of fever, and was forced to keep my bed."

"You came back again without being quite cured."

"If I had remained a week longer in the country I should have died."

"But now you have returned you must take care of yourself. Your friends will come to see you, and, if you will allow me, I'll be one of them."

"I shall get up in a couple of hours."

"How imprudent!"

"I must get up."

"Why this hurry?"

"I must go to the Commissary of Police."

"Why do you not send some one else on this errand, which may bring on a fresh attack of your illness?"

"It is the only thing that can cure me; I must see her. Since I heard she was dead, and especially since I have seen her grave, I cannot sleep any more. I cannot imagine that this woman, whom I left so young and so lovely, is dead; I must assure myself of it; I must see what change Heaven has made in the being whom I loved so much, and perhaps the horror of the spectacle will obliterate my despair and my recollections. I trust you will accompany me, if it does not annoy you too much."

"What did her sister say to you?"

"Nothing. She seemed very much astonished that a stranger should wish to purchase a piece of ground, and erect a tomb for Marguerite; and she signed at once the authorization I asked for."

"If you follow my advice you will defer removing the body until you are better."

"Believe me, I am quite strong. Moreover, my sorrow

never leaves me any rest; and I shall grow mad if I do not as soon as possible accomplish what I intend to do. I pledge you my word that I cannot be quiet till I have seen Marguerite. It is perhaps a fancy, caused by the fever that consumes me, a dream of my restless nights, a result of my madness, but even if I were to become a Trappist, as Monsieur de Rancé became after seeing the corpse of his beloved, I will see her."

"I can understand it," I said to Armand, "and I am wholly at your service. Have you seen Julie Duprat?"

"Yes, I saw her the very day I returned."

"Has she given you the papers Marguerite left for you?"

"Here they are."

Armand drew a roll of paper from beneath his pillow, and instantly put it back.

"I know these papers by heart," he said; "for the last three weeks I have read them ten times a day. You shall read them also, but later on, when I am more calm, and then I can explain to you all the love and affection this confession reveals."

"But now I have a service to ask of you."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"You have a carriage at the door?"

"Yes."

"Will you take my passport, go to the post-office, and ask if there are any letters for me? My father and sister may have addressed them 'poste restante,' and I left in such a hurry that I did not even inquire if there were any before leaving. After you have done this, we can go together to let the Commissary of Police know that the removal of the body is going to take place to-morrow."

Armand handed me his passport, and I went to the post-office in the Rue Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

There were two letters for Duval. I took them and went back to his rooms.

When I returned, Armand was dressed and ready to go out.

"Thank you," he said, taking his letters. "Yes," added he, having looked at the addresses, "yes, they are from my father and sister; they must have been astonished at my silence."

He opened the letters, and did not read them, but rather guessed their contents, for each of them was of four pages. After a few moments he folded them up again, and said: "Let us go, I will answer these to-morrow."

We went to the Commissary of Police, and Armand handed him the authorization from Marguerite's sister.

Thereupon, the Commissary gave him a letter for the keeper of the cemetery, and it was arranged that the removal of the body should take place the next day at ten o'clock in the morning; that I should call for him an hour before, and that we should go together to the cemetery.

I also was anxious to be present at this removal, and I confess that I slept little that night.

If I am to judge from the thoughts that kept me awake, the night must have been a long one for Armand.

When I entered his room at nine o'clock the next morning I found him terribly pale; but he seemed calm.

He smiled, and gave me his hand.

His candles had burned down to the sockets, and before we went out he took a very bulky letter addressed to his father, and containing no doubt his impressions of the previous night.

Half an hour later we were at Montmartre.

The Commissary was waiting for us.

We walked slowly towards Marguerite's grave. The Com-

missary went first, Armand and I followed close behind him.

From time to time I felt Armand's arm trembling convulsively, as if he were seized with a sudden chill. When I looked at him he understood my glance and smiled, but since we left his rooms we had not exchanged a single word.

Shortly before we reached the grave Armand stopped to wipe his face, which was dripping with perspiration.

I took advantage of this pause to breathe myself, for I also felt almost choking.

Whence comes the painful pleasure which one takes in spectacles of this kind?

We arrived at the grave. The gardener had already removed all the flower-pots; the iron railing had been taken away, and two men were at work shovelling the earth.

Armand leaned against a tree and looked on.

His whole soul seemed to have passed into his eyes.

Presently one of the grave-diggers' spades struck against a stone.

At this sound Armand drew back as if he had received an electric shock and squeezed my hand so violently that he hurt me.

The grave-digger now took a large shovel and gradually emptied the grave; then, when he came to the large stones which covered the coffin, he threw them out one by one.

I observed Armand; for I feared that at any moment his feelings, which he visibly suppressed, might overpower him, but he continued looking on with his eyes fixed and glaring, as if he were mad, and only a slight quivering of the cheeks and lips showed that he was suffering from violent nervous excitement.

As for myself, I can but say one thing, that I wished I had not come.

When the coffin was uncovered the Commissary said to the workmen: "Open."

The men obeyed, as if they were doing the most ordinary thing in the world.

The coffin was of oak and the men began to unscrew the upper lid. The humidity of the soil had rusted the screws, and it was not without some difficulty that the coffin was opened. A horrible smell became instantly perceptible, in spite of the aromatic herbs with which it had been filled.

"Great Heavens! Great Heavens!" murmured Armand, turning paler than before.

The grave-diggers themselves drew back.

A large white shroud covered the body, of which the outline was partly visible. The shroud had been entirely gnawed away at one corner and left exposed a foot of the corpse.

I almost felt sick, and even while I write these lines the remembrance of this scene comes back to me in all its horrible reality.

"Make haste," said the Commissary.

Then one of the men began to unstitch the shroud with his hand, and, lifting a corner of it, suddenly exposed the face of Marguerite.

It was horrible to see; it is horrible to relate.

Of the eyes there remained but two empty sockets; the lips had disappeared, and the white teeth were tightly clasped. The long black hair, quite dry, stuck to the temples and partly veiled the green cavities of the cheeks; and yet I recognized in this visage the lively, red and white countenance which I had so often beheld.

Armand, without being able to take his eyes from this spectacle, put his handkerchief to his mouth and was biting it.

As for me, it seemed that an iron band was clasping my brow, and that a veil covered my eyes; there was a ringing in my ears, and all that I could do was to open a smelling-bottle, which I had brought accidentally, and to make use of it.

In the midst of this attack of giddiness I heard the Commissary say to Duval:

"Do you recognize the deceased?"

"Yes," replied the young man, almost inaudibly.

"Then close the coffin and take it away."

The workmen replaced the shroud upon the countenance of the corpse, closed the coffin, lifted it up, and moved towards the spot to which they had been told to carry it.

Armand did not move, his eyes were riveted on the empty grave; he was pale as the corpse which we had just beheld and seemed petrified.

I knew what was going to happen when the body should be removed, and when his excitement gave way and could no longer sustain him.

I approached the Commissary and asked, pointing to Armand:

"Is the presence of this gentleman any longer necessary?"

"No," he replied; "I even advise you to take him away, for he seems very unwell."

"Come away," said I to Armand, taking his arm.

"What?" he asked, staring at me without recognizing me.

"All is over," I added, "you really must come away, my friend; you are pale and cold, these emotions will kill you."

"You are right; let us go," replied he, mechanically, but without moving a step.

I seized him by the arm and drew him along.

He allowed himself to be led like a child, only murmuring from time to time:

"Did you see those eyes?"

And then he turned round, as if the vision called him back.

Meanwhile his walk became unsteady; he could only move by fits and starts; his teeth chattered; his hands were icy cold, and he appeared to be in a high state of nervous agitation.

I spoke to him, but he did not answer; all that he could do was to allow himself to be led away.

At the gates of the cemetery our carriage was waiting; and it was high time for us to reach it.

Hardly had Armand taken his seat when his shivering increased, and he became violently agitated, but the fear of alarming me made him murmur whilst pressing my hand:

"It is nothing, it is nothing; I wish I could shed tears."

I heard his chest heave, whilst his eyes became bloodshot; but his tears refused to flow.

I made use of the smelling-bottle I had brought with me, and when we arrived at his rooms the nervous fit had subsided, and he was only shivering.

With the help of his man-servant I got him into bed; I ordered a large fire to be lit in his room and ran to fetch my doctor, to whom I related what had happened.

He came back with me in a few moments.

Armand's face was purple; he was delirious, and uttered incoherent words, amongst which only the name of Marguerite could be heard distinctly.

"What is the matter with him?" I asked the doctor, after he had examined the patient.

"He has brain fever," he replied, "and it is very for-

tunate for him that he has got it; for, may Heaven forgive me if I am wrong! I believe that otherwise he would have become insane; luckily, the bodily illness will conquer the mental one, and perhaps in a month he may be cured of both."

CHAPTER VII.

Diseases like the one by which Armand was attacked have at least this advantage, that they kill quickly or are very soon cured.

A fortnight after the events I have just related, Armand was quite convalescent, and we became very intimate. I scarcely left his room all the time his illness lasted.

Spring had come, flowers and trees were budding, and the birds were singing. The window of my friend's room opened pleasantly upon a garden, of which he could breathe the healthy air.

The doctor had permitted him to get up, and we often sat talking near the open window during the warmest hour of the day, that is, from twelve till two o'clock.

I carefully avoided speaking about Marguerite, always dreading that, despite the apparent calmness of the patient, this name should awaken sad remembrances, now lulled to sleep; but Armand, on the contrary, seemed to take a pleasure in speaking of her; no longer, as formerly, with tears in his eyes, but with a gentle sigh which reassured me as to the state of his mind.

I noticed that since his last visit to the cemetery, which had been the cause of this violent attack, his illness seemed to have filled up the measure of his moral sufferings, and the death of Marguerite appeared to him but as a thing of the past. A sort of consolation had been the result of the certainty he had acquired; and

drive away the sombre image which often presented itself to him, he sought to recall the happy moments of his "liaison" with Marguerite, and seemed only to wish to dwell on these.

The body was too exhausted by the attack, and even by the cure, to allow the mind to be stirred up by violent emotions; and the merry sight of spring, which was continually before Armand's eyes, in spite of himself led his thoughts to pleasant imagery.

He had always obstinately refused to let his family know the danger he was in, and after he had recovered his father was still ignorant that he had been so ill.

One evening he remained at the window later than usual. The weather had been superb, and the sun was setting in a twilight glowing with azure and gold. Although we were in Paris, the surrounding verdure seemed to shut us out from the world, and only now and then the noise of some carriage disturbed our conversation.

"It was about this time of the year, and on the evening of a day like this, that I first became acquainted with Marguerite," said Armand to me, following the train of his own thoughts, and not paying any attention to what I was saying to him.

I made no reply.

Presently he turned again towards me and said:

"I must tell you this story; you can write a book about it, but no one will believe it to be true; still it may perhaps be made interesting."

"You shall tell it to me later on, my friend," I said, "you are not strong enough yet."

"It is very warm this evening; I have eaten the breast of a chicken," he replied, smiling, "I have no fever, we have nothing to do, and I am going to tell you everything."

"Well, if you insist upon it, I am listening."

"It is a very simple story," he added; "but I must tell it you in the order in which the events happened. If you make anything of it by and by, you are at perfect liberty to tell it your own way."

This is the story he related to me, and I have scarcely changed a word of his touching narrative.

"Yes," resumed Armand, letting his head rest against the back of his chair; "yes, it was on such an evening as this; I had spent the day in the country with one of my friends, Gaston R——. In the evening we returned to Paris, and not knowing what to do with ourselves, went to the 'Théâtre des Variétés.'"

Between the acts we went out, and in one of the passages we passed a tall lady, to whom my friend bowed.

"To whom did you bow?" asked I.

"To Marguerite Gautier," he replied.

"She seems greatly changed, for I do not recognize her," I said, with an emotion, which I will explain presently.

"She has been very ill. The poor girl will not last long."

I remember his words as if they had only been spoken yesterday.

You must know, my friend, that for two years, whenever I met this girl, she produced a strange impression on me.

Without knowing why, I then turned pale and my heart began to beat violently. One of my friends who dabbles in the occult sciences declared that it was "an affinity of fluids," but I believe simply that I was destined to fall in love with Marguerite, and that I had a presentiment of the fact.

She really produced an impression upon me; and several

of my friends had observed it, and were very much amused when they found out who the lady was.

The first time I ever saw her was on the Place de la Bourse, at the door of Susse's shop. She wore a white dress, stepped out of an open carriage, and was received with a murmur of admiration on her entering the shop. As for me, I remained fixed to the spot from the moment she entered until she left. Through the window I saw her select some articles which she had come to purchase. I might have entered also, but I dared not; I did not know who she was, and I feared she might guess why I had come in, and be offended. However, I did not think I should ever see her again.

She was elegantly dressed; she wore a muslin dress with a great many flounces; an Indian shawl with flowers embroidered in silk, and corners worked in gold; an Italian straw hat, and a single bracelet composed of a massive chain of gold, which, just then, was fashionable.

She re-entered the carriage and drove away.

One of the shopmen was standing at the door, following with his eyes the carriage of his fashionable customer; I approached him and asked her name.

"That is Mademoiselle Marguerite Gautier," he replied.

I did not like to ask for her address, and went away.

The remembrance of this vision, for such it really was, did not leave me, as many such visions had done before, and I was looking everywhere for this lady in white, so regally beautiful.

Some days afterwards a grand performance took place at the "Opéra Comique," and I went there. The first person I beheld in one of the boxes on the ground-tier was Marguerite Gautier.

The young man who was with me recognized her also,

for he said, as he named her to me: "Look at that pretty girl."

At that moment, Marguerite turned her opera-glass in our direction; she saw my friend, smiled and made him a sign to come up, and pay a visit to her box.

"I shall go and say good-evening to her," he said. "I shall be back in a moment."

I could not help saying to him:

"You are very fortunate."

"Why?"

"To know that lady."

"Are you in love with her?"

"No," said I, blushing; for I really did not know my feelings, "but I should very much like to make her acquaintance."

"Come with me and I will introduce you."

"Ask her permission first."

"Nonsense, it is not necessary to be so particular with her; come."

This remark pained me. I dreaded to acquire the certainty that Marguerite was unworthy of the feeling which I entertained for her.

In a book by Alphonse Karr, called "Am Rauchen," there is a story of a man who one evening follows a girl, very elegantly dressed, and so handsome that he falls in love with her at first sight. He feels himself strong enough to undertake anything, persevering enough to conquer everything and courageous enough to do everything for the mere reward of being allowed to kiss this girl's hand. He scarcely dares steal a glance at the pretty ankle which she displays in lifting up her dress to avoid its being soiled. Whilst he is dreaming of all that he would do to obtain this woman she suddenly stops at the corner of a street and asks him to come up to her rooms with her.

He turns away his head, crosses the street, and goes home, quite broken-hearted.

I remembered this story; and I, who would have suffered anything for Marguerite's sake, feared that she would accept me at too short a notice and grant me too quickly her love, for which I was almost ready to make any sacrifice and for which I would have waited a long time. It is thus with us men; but it is very fortunate that the imagination leaves this poetical halo to the senses and that our corporeal desires make this concession to the aspirations of the soul.

If any one would have said to me "You shall win this woman to-night, and shall be killed to-morrow," I should have accepted the offer. But had I been told, "Give her ten louis and you shall be her lover," I should have refused and have wept like a child, who finds on awakening the castle vanished of which he had caught a glimpse during his dreams.

Nevertheless, I wished to know her; it was a means, and, indeed, the only means, of finding out what she really was.

I therefore told my friend that I should not like to be introduced to her without her permission, and rambled about the passages, thinking to myself that a moment hence I should meet her, without knowing how I should bear her glance.

I even tried to study beforehand what I was going to say to her.

Love is naught but sublime childishness!

A moment afterwards my friend returned.

"She expects us," said he.

"Is she alone?" I asked.

"With another lady."

"Are there no gentlemen?"

"No."

"Come, let us go then."

My friend's intention seemed to be to leave the theatre.

"Hello!" said I, "this is not the way."

"We are going to buy some 'bonbons.' She asked for them."

We entered a confectioner's shop in the "Passage de l'Opéra."

I should have liked to buy the whole shop, and began to think with what we could fill a big bag, when my friend asked for a pound of "raisins glacés."

"Do you know if she likes them?"

"It is well known that she never touches any other 'bonbons.'"

"I say," he continued, as we returned, "do you know to what sort of a woman I am going to introduce you? Do not imagine that she is a duchess. She is simply a demirep, very much so, my dear fellow; so do not make any compliments with her, but say whatever comes uppermost in your mind."

"All right," I stammered out, and I followed him, saying to myself that I was about to be cured of my passion.

As we entered the box Marguerite was laughing loudly.

I should have liked her to be sad.

My friend introduced me; Marguerite made me a slight bow, and said:

"Where are my 'bonbons?'"

"Here they are."

She took them and looked at me. I cast down my eyes and blushed.

She whispered a few words to the lady who was with her, and then they both burst into laughter.

I was quite sure that I was the subject of their merriment, and I became more confused than ever. At that time I was courting a little shop-girl, very affectionate and very sentimental, whose sentiment and melancholy letters often made me laugh. I understood what I must have made her suffer, and for fully five minutes I loved her as never woman was loved before.

Marguerite ate her bonbons without troubling herself further about me.

My friend, who had introduced me, did not like to leave me in this ridiculous position.

"Marguerite," he said, "you must not be surprised that Monsieur Duval does not say anything to you. You overpower him so much that he cannot utter a word."

"I rather think he has accompanied you because you thought it would be tiresome to come here alone."

"If that were true," said I in my turn, "I should not have urged my friend to ask you for permission to introduce me."

"That was perhaps only a way of putting off the fatal moment."

If one is acquainted with women of the class to which Marguerite belonged, one is aware what pleasure they take in making fun of and in teasing people whom they meet for the first time. It is, no doubt, a sort of revenge for the humiliations to which they are often compelled to submit from those they see every day.

It is, therefore, necessary, in order to answer them, to be accustomed to their society, and I was quite unaccustomed to it; besides, the ideal which I had formed of Marguerite made her raillery more bitter to me. Whatever this woman did could not be a matter of indifference to me. I rose, therefore, saying with a change of voice which I could not wholly conceal:

"If such is your opinion of me, Madame, it only remains to take my leave, and I assure you that I shall not intrude again."

I bowed and took my departure.

Hardly had I closed the door of the box when I heard another burst of laughter. I only wished some one would have run against me at that moment.

I returned to my seat.

The prompter's knock was heard, which is the signal for the rising of the curtain.

Ernest returned to his stall by my side.

"How strangely you behaved," he said, as he took his seat; "they thought you were mad."

"What did Marguerite say when I came away?"

"She laughed and declared she had never seen such a strange fellow. But you must not consider yourself beaten; only you should not do such girls the honor to take what they say seriously. They do not know what elegance and politeness mean; they are like dogs on which one sprinkles perfume and which find the smell so disagreeable that they go and roll themselves in the gutter."

"After all, what does it matter?" said I, trying to take an indifferent tone; "I shall never see her again, and although I was pleased with her before I knew her, it is quite a different thing now that I have been introduced."

"Nonsense," he replied, "I do not despair of seeing you one day or other at the back of her box and hear it reported that you are ruining yourself for her sake. But you are right, she has been very badly brought up; still she would make a capital mistress."

Luckily the curtain rose and my friend did not utter another word. For me to say what was played would be impossible. All that I remember is that from time to time I raised my eyes to the box which I had quitted so

abruptly and that the faces of fresh visitors succeeded each other every moment.

However, I was far from thinking no more of Marguerite. Another feeling had taken possession of me. It seemed to me that I had to wipe out her insult and my ridiculous behavior; I said to myself that, if it cost me all that I had in the world, I would master this girl and by right take the place I had abandoned so suddenly.

Before the close of the performance, Marguerite and her friend left their box.

In spite of myself I quitted my stall.

"Are you going?" asked Ernest.

"Yes."

"Why ?"

At that moment he perceived that Marguerite's box was empty, and exclaimed:

"Go! go! May luck attend you, or rather, may you have a better chance!"

I went.

On the stairs I heard the rustling of dresses, and some people talking. I stepped aside and, without being observed, saw the two ladies pass, accompanied by a couple of gentlemen.

Under the colonnade of the theatre a little page was waiting.

"Go and tell the coachman to drive to the Café Anglais," said Marguerite, "we will walk as far as that."

Some minutes afterwards, loitering about on the Boulevard, I saw at the window of one of the private rooms of the restaurant Marguerite leaning on the balcony, and plucking to pieces one of the camellias of her bouquet.

One of the gentlemen was bending over her and speaking to her in a low tone of voice.

I went and sat down on the first floor of the restaurant

opposite, the "Maison d'Or," and never lost sight of the window of the "Café Anglais."

At one o'clock in the morning Marguerite entered the carriage with her three friends.

I took a cab and followed.

The carriage stopped at No. 9, Rue d'Antin.

Marguerite entered her house alone.

This was, no doubt, an accident, but that accident made me very happy.

After that day, I often met Marguerite at the theatres or in the Champs-Elysées. She seemed always good-tempered, and I always felt the same emotion.

A fortnight, however, elapsed without my seeing her anywhere. I met Gaston by accident and asked him what had become of her.

"The poor girl is very ill," he replied.

"What's the matter with her?"

"There is something wrong with her lungs, and as she has not led the sort of life to get better, she is confined to her bed, and reported to be at death's door."

How strange are a man's feelings! I was almost glad of this illness.

I went, however, daily to inquire how she was, but never left my name, nor my card. I thus learned her convalescence, and her departure for Bagnères.

Time passed; the impression she had made on me was gradually fading away from my mind, though I remembered her still. I travelled about a good deal. Fresh "liaisons," other habits, and various occupations took the place of this one idea; and when I thought of my first meeting her, I only saw in it one of those fancies which beset a man when he is very young, and appear rather laughable a few years afterwards.

But there was no merit in my completely forgetting her;

for I had lost sight of Marguerite since her leaving Paris; and, as I told you, when she passed me in the lobby of the "Théâtre des Variétés" I did not recognize her.

It was true she wore a veil; but if she had worn a veil two years ago I should have recognized her all the same, without needing to see her; I should have divined her presence intuitively.

This did not prevent my heart beating, when I knew who it was. The two years passed without seeing her, and the effect which it seemed to me this separation should have produced vanished at the mere touch of her dress.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEVERTHELESS, continued Armand, after a pause, though I was aware that I was still in love with her, I felt more manly than before, and though I longed to meet Marguerite again, I also wished to show her that I was no longer as weak as I had been.

How strange a man in love behaves, and what excuses he manufactures to obtain what he desires!

I could not remain any longer in the lobby, and went back to my orchestra-stall, throwing a rapid glance at the audience to see what box she occupied.

She was in one of the boxes on the ground-tier, but quite alone. She was much changed, as I have told you. I no longer discovered on her lips that smile of indifference, for she had suffered, and was suffering still.

Although it was April she wore a winter-dress and was wrapped in velvet.

I looked so long at her that my gaze at last attracted her notice.

She stared at me for a few moments, took her opera-glass to examine me more closely, and thought, doubtless, that she recognized me, without being absolutely certain who I was; for when she laid down her glass she showed the charming courtesy of a woman, and smiled, in reply to the recognition she seemed to expect from me; but I did not respond, in order to show her that I was indifferent and had forgotten her when she remembered me.

She thought she was mistaken and turned away her head.

The curtain rose.

I have many times seen Marguerite at the theatre, but I have never seen her pay the least attention to the performance.

As for me, I did not feel any interest in the play and occupied myself with her alone, taking very good care, however, not to let her perceive it. I noticed that she exchanged looks with some one who occupied the box opposite hers, and in casting my eyes towards that box I recognized a woman with whom I was pretty well acquainted.

This woman, formerly a demirep, had tried to become an actress and failed; but, counting upon her acquaintance with the "gay world" of Paris, had started in business and taken a milliner's shop.

I thought that she might be the means of my meeting Marguerite again, and when she looked towards me I made her a sign and nodded to her.

As I had anticipated, she beckoned me to come to her box.

Prudence Duvernoy, such was the happy name of the milliner, was one of those buxom women of about forty with whom a man has no need to exercise any great amount of diplomacy to make them say what he wishes to know; above all, when what he wishes to know is as simple as the question I had put to her.

I seized the opportunity when she was again exchanging glances with Marguerite to ask her:

"Whom are you looking at?"

"At Marguerite Gautier."

"Do you know her?"

"Yes. She is one of my clients and my neighbor."

"Do you live then in the Rue d'Antin?"

"At No. 7. The window of her dressing-room overlooks mine."

"They say she is a charming girl?"

"Don't you know her?"

"No, I should like to."

"Shall I ask her if you can pay her a visit in her box?"

"No, I should prefer being first introduced to her."

"At her own house?"

"Yes."

"That is more difficult."

"Why?"

"Because her friend is an old Duke who is very jealous."

"How very nice to speak of him as 'her friend.'"

"Yes, 'her friend,'" resumed Prudence. "The poor old man would find it very difficult to become a lover."

Prudence then told me how Marguerite had first met the Duke at Bagnères.

"Is that the reason why she is here alone?" I asked.

"Precisely."

"But who will take her home?"

"The Duke."

"Is he coming for her, then?"

"In a moment."

"And who will take you home?"

"Nobody."

"I offer my services."

"But you are with a friend, I believe?"

"We offer our services, then."

"But who is your friend?"

"He is a very nice and a very intelligent fellow, and he will be delighted to make your acquaintance."

"Well, that is arranged; we shall all leave after this piece, for I have seen the next one."

"I shall be most happy; I will go and tell my friend."

"Go, then."

"Ah!" exclaimed Prudence, just at the moment I was leaving, "see, there is the Duke just entering Marguerite's box."

I looked.

A man of about seventy took his place behind the young woman and handed her a bag of "bonbons," of which she immediately took some, smiling at the same time. Then she came to the front of the box and made a sign to Prudence which might mean:

"Would you like some of these?"

"No," answered Prudence.

Then Marguerite took back the bag and began conversing with the Duke.

All these details may seem childish to you; but everything that refers to this young creature is still so fresh in my memory that I cannot prevent myself thinking about it this very day.

I went down to the stalls to acquaint Gaston with the arangement I had made for him and for myself.

He agreed to go with us.

We left our stalls with the intention of going to Madame Duvernoy's box.

Scarcely had we opened the door leading to the stalls when we were obliged to stop to allow Marguerite and the Duke to pass as they were leaving the theatre.

I would have given ten years of my life to be in the place of that old gentleman.

On reaching the Boulevard he handed Marguerite into a phaeton, which he drove himself, and they disappeared as fast as a pair of splendid horses could carry them.

We entered Prudence's box.

When the piece was finished, we took an ordinary four-wheeler to drive us to No. 7 Rue d'Antin. On our arriving there, Prudence invited us to come in and have a look at her rooms, which we had never seen yet, and of which she seemed very proud. You can judge how readily I accepted her offer.

It appeared to me that I was gradually drawing nearer to Marguerite, and I soon led the conversation on everything concerning her.

"Is the old Duke with your neighbor?" I asked Prudence.

"No, she must be alone."

"Then she will be horribly dull," remarked Gaston.

"We pass almost all our evenings together, or when she comes home she calls me," said Prudence. "She never goes to bed before two in the morning. She cannot sleep earlier."

"Why?"

"Because there is something wrong with her chest, and she is almost always in a fever."

"Has she no lovers, then?" I asked.

"I never see any one when I leave her; but I cannot answer for it that no one comes after I am gone. I often meet at her rooms, of an evening, a certain Count de N——, who imagines that he advances his suit by paying visits at eleven o'clock at night, and by sending her as much jewelry as she wants; but she has taken a strong dislike to him, which is wrong on her part, for he is very wealthy. It is no use my telling her again and again, 'My dear child, this is the very man you want.' She usually listens to what I say, but, when I begin to talk about him, she turns her back on me, and replies that he is too stupid. I admit that he is stupid; but he would give her a position,

whereas the old Duke may die any day. Old men are selfish; his family are continually reproaching him for his affection for Marguerite, and for both these reasons he will leave her nothing. I preach to her, but she answers, 'It will be quite time enough to take the Count when the Duke is dead.'

"It is not always amusing," continued Prudence, "to live as she does. I know it would not suit me; I would soon send the worthy old gentleman to the right about, for he is very insipid. He calls Marguerite his daughter, and takes care of her as if she were a child, but he never leaves her for a moment alone. I am sure at this very minute one of his servants is standing in the street to watch who is going out, and especially who is entering the house."

"Poor Marguerite," remarked Gaston, as he sat down at the piano, and began playing a waltz. "I did not know this; though it seemed to me that she looked less cheerful of late."

"Hush!" said Prudence; "listen."

Gaston paused.

"I think she calls me."

We listened.

Some one was calling Prudence.

"Now, then, gentlemen, go away," said Madame Duvernoy to us.

"This is the way you practice hospitality," observed Gaston, laughing. "We shall go when it suits us."

"Why should we go?" I said.

"Because I am going to Marguerite."

"We will wait your return here."

"That is out of the question."

"Then we will go with you."

"That is worse."

"But I know Marguerite," said Gaston, "and I can go and pay her a visit."

"But Armand does not know her."

"I will introduce him."

"That is impossible."

We again heard Marguerite's voice calling Prudence.

The latter went to her dressing-room window and opened it. Gaston and I followed her.

We hid ourselves so as not to be seen from without.

"I have been calling you these ten minutes," said Marguerite from her window, in an almost commanding tone.

"What do you want with me?"

"I want you to come immediately, because Count de N—— is still here, and wearies me to death.

"But I cannot come just now."

"What prevents you?"

"There are two young men in my rooms who won't go away."

"Tell them that you have to go out."

"I have told them so."

"Very well, then, leave them. When they see you have gone they will go away too."

"After having turned everything topsy-turvy."

"But what do they want?"

"They wish to see you."

"Who are they?"

"You know one of them, Gaston R——."

"Oh! yes, I know him. Who is the other?"

"Armand Duval! You do not know him?"

"No, I don't; but bring them all the same. Anything rather than the Count. Don't be long, I am waiting for you."

Marguerite closed her window, and Prudence shut hers.

Marguerite, who had for one moment recollected my

features, did not remember my name. I would have preferred an unfavorable recollection to this forgetfulness.

"I knew she would be delighted to see us," said Gaston.

"Delighted is not quite the word," replied Prudence, putting on her shawl and bonnet. "She receives you in order to drive away the Count. Try to be more agreeable than he is, or I am sure Marguerite will pick a quarrel with me."

Prudence went downstairs, and we followed.

I was trembling all over; it seemed to me that this visit was destined to have a great influence on my life.

I felt even more nervous than on the evening of my introduction to Marguerite in the box at the "Opéra Comique."

When we reached the door of her apartments, which you have seen, my heart beat so violently as to prevent me from thinking.

A few notes of the piano fell on our ears.

A woman who looked more like a companion than a lady's maid opened the door to us.

We entered the drawing-room and went through to the boudoir, which was then as you saw it.

A young man was leaning against the mantelpiece.

Marguerite, seated at the piano, let her fingers run over the keys, and commenced some tunes which she did not finish.

Dullness seemed to predominate; for the gentleman was embarrassed by his own insignificance, and the lady by this dull personage's presence.

On hearing Prudence's voice Marguerite rose and came to meet us; and after having bestowed a glance expressive of her thanks on Madame Duvernoy, she said:

"I am glad to see you, gentlemen. Come in."

CHAPTER IX.

"GOOD-EVENING, my dear Mr. Gaston," said Marguerite to my friend. "I am very glad to see you. Why did you not come to my box at the 'Variétés'?"

"I did not like to intrude."

"Friends," said Marguerite, and she dwelt on the word, as if to make it clear to those who were present that in spite of the familiar way in which she received Gaston, he was not, and never had been, anything more than a friend; "friends never intrude."

"Then, as a friend, will you allow me to introduce to you Monsieur Armand Duval?"

"I already told Prudence to do so."

"Madame," said I bowing, and endeavoring to make myself almost intelligible, "I have already had the honor of being introduced to you."

Marguerite seemed to be trying to recall when that had been; but it had slipped her memory.

"I am thankful, Madame," I continued, "that you have forgotten my former introduction, for I made myself very ridiculous, and must have been very tiresome. About two years ago, when you were at the 'Opéra Comique,' I was presented to you by Ernest de ——."

"Ah! I remember," said Marguerite, smiling. "It was not you who were ridiculous, it was I who was disagreeable; I even tease people sometimes now, but less frequently than I used to. I trust you have forgiven me, sir."

And she offered me her hand, which I kissed.

"Indeed," she resumed, "I have the bad habit of wishing to embarrass people whom I see for the first time. It is very stupid; but my doctor tells me it is on account of my nervous irritability, and because I am always in bad health; and you may believe my doctor."

"But you seem in very good health."

"I have been very ill."

"I am aware of it."

"Who told you?"

"Everybody knew it. I called frequently to inquire after you, and I was delighted to hear that you were much better."

"I never received your card."

"I never left it."

"Were you then the gentleman who when I was ill in bed called every day to ask how I was, and who would never leave his name?"

"Yes, it was I."

"Then you were more than kind, you were generous. You, Count, would not have acted thus," added she, turning towards Monsieur de N——, and after having cast upon me one of those looks by which women express their opinion of men.

"I have only known you these two months," replied the Count.

"And this gentleman only knew me five minutes. You always say something stupid."

Women are merciless to men whom they dislike.

The Count blushed, and bit his lips.

I was sorry for him, for he appeared in love like myself; and the harsh candor of Marguerite must have made him very unhappy, especially in the presence of a couple of strangers.

"You were playing the piano when we came in," I

said, in order to change the conversation. "Will you not do me the favor of treating me as an old acquaintance, and continue your music?"

"Oh!" said she, throwing herself on the sofa, and inviting us to sit down beside her, "Gaston knows what sort of music I play. It is good enough when I am alone with the Count, but I have no wish to let you suffer such tortures."

"You prefer then to play when I am here," remarked the Count with a smile which he endeavored to render expressive and ironical.

"You are wrong to blame me for this, for it is the only preference I'll ever show you."

It seemed clear that this poor young fellow was not to say a single word. He cast on Marguerite a look full of entreaty.

"I say, Prudence," she added, "have you done what I asked you?"

"Yes."

"That's right. You will tell me all about it by-and-by. I have something to say to you; so, do not go until I have had some conversation with you."

"We are intruding," I observed; "and now that we, or rather I have been introduced for a second time, and in order to make you forget the first introduction, Gaston and myself will take our leave."

"On no account! My observation was not intended for you; on the contrary, I wish you to stay."

The Count drew an elegant watch from his pocket, to see what o'clock it was.

"It is time for me to go to the club," he remarked.

Marguerite made no reply.

The Count then left the fireplace, and approaching her, said:

"Adieu, Madame."

Marguerite rose.

"You are going already, my dear Count?"

"Yes. I fear that I weary you."

"Not more than usual. When shall I see you again?"

"Whenever you will permit me."

"Adieu, then."

This was cruel, you must allow.

Luckily the Count was very well brought up, and very good-tempered. He contented himself with kissing Marguerite's hand, which she carelessly enough held out to him, and after he had bowed to her left the room.

As he passed the door he cast a glance at Prudence.

She shrugged her shoulders, with an air which seemed to say, "What would you have me do? I have done all I could."

"Nanine!" exclaimed Marguerite, "show a light."

We heard the outer door open and shut.

"At last, he has gone," said Marguerite, coming back to the room. "I cannot stand that young man at any price."

"My dear child," said Prudence, "you are really too cruel to him, for he is very kind and considerate. On your chimney-piece there is a watch he has made you a present of, for which he must have paid at least five thousand francs, I am sure."

And Madame Duvernoy approached the mantelpiece and played with the trinket of which she had spoken, casting upon it covetous looks.

"My dear," said Marguerite, seating herself at the piano, "when I put into one scale what he gives me and into the other what he says to me, I think that he pays very little for his visits."

"The poor fellow is in love with you."

"If I were compelled to listen to all those who are in love with me I should not have time to eat my dinner."

And she ran her fingers a few times over the keys of the piano; after which, coming back to us, she said:

"Will you take something? I should like to drink a glass of punch."

"And I, I could eat a little bit of chicken," said Prudence, "if we are going to have some supper."

"That is a good idea," remarked Gaston, "let us go and have supper somewhere."

"No, we are going to have supper here," said Marguerite, and she rang the bell for Nanine, who soon made her appearance.

"Let us have some supper, Nanine."

"What shall it be?"

"Anything you like, but bring it at once."

Nanine went away.

"That's it!" said Marguerite, jumping about like a child, "we are going to have some supper. How tiresome that stupid Count is!"

The more I saw of this girl the more she bewitched me. She was fascinatingly beautiful. Even her spare figure was a charm in itself.

I fell in deep thought.

I can hardly explain what were my feelings. I was full of indulgence for her mode of life, full of admiration for her beauty. The proof of disinterestedness she gave in not accepting the advances of the wealthy and fashionable young Count, who was quite ready to ruin himself for her sake, excused, in my eyes, all her previous faults.

There was, without doubt, some sincerity in this girl.

She was evidently still only on the threshold of vice. Her firm step, her lithesome form, her pink and expanded nostrils, and her large eyes, with slight blue circles under-

neath, denoted one of those ardent temperaments which spread around them a perfume of voluptuousness, like those Oriental vials, which, however carefully closed, allow to escape the odor of the essence they contain.

Indeed, whether it was her temperament, or an effect of her morbid condition, but, from time to time, flashes of passion lit up her eyes, of which the realization would have been a dream of Heaven for the man whom she could have truly loved. Numerous men had loved Marguerite, and those whom she had professed to love could not yet be counted.

In short, one recognized in this girl the virgin whom some accident had made a courtesan, and the courtesan whom an accident might have made a most loving and most pure virgin. Marguerite possessed still pride and independence; two sentiments which, when wounded, produce the same effects as modesty. I remained silent, and only betrayed my heartfelt feelings in my looks.

Then she said to me, suddenly: "It was you who called to inquire after me when I was ill?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that you behaved very generously. What can I do to thank you?"

"Permit me to call occasionally on you."

"As often as you please, from five to six in the afternoon and from eleven o'clock till midnight. I say, Gaston, play me the 'Invitation to the Waltz.'"

"Why?"

"First to please me, and secondly because I can never learn to play it myself."

"What's the difficulty?"

"The third part. The passage in sharps."

Gaston rose, went to the piano, and began to play that

marvellous melody of Weber's, of which she had left the music open on the instrument.

Marguerite, with one hand resting on the piano, looked at the music while he was playing, and hummed each note in a low voice; and when Gaston came to the passage which she had mentioned she sang it, and beat time with her fingers on the top of the instrument.

"Do, re, me, fa, sol, la, si, do. There! that is what I cannot play. Let me hear it once more."

Gaston repeated the passage, after which Marguerite said:

"Now, let me try."

She sat down and played it in her turn, but the rebellious fingers invariably made mistakes with one of the notes just mentioned.

"Now this is incredible," she exclaimed, just like a child; "I never can play this passage. Do you know I try it sometimes till two o'clock in the morning? That stupid Count plays it without looking at the music, and admirably too; and that is the reason, I believe, I am so angry with him.

She began again, but always with the same result.

"The deuce take Weber, music, and the piano!" she exclaimed, flinging the music-book to the other end of the room. "Can you make it out why I cannot play eight sharps one after another?"

And she folded her arms, and looked at us, whilst stamping on the floor.

Her face was flushed, and a slight cough parted her lips.

"There you are," observed Prudence, who had taken off her hat, and was arranging her hair before the glass; "you are getting in a rage, and you will be ill. Let us have some supper, and that will be much better; as for me, I am dying of hunger."

Marguerite rang a second time, and then went again to the piano, where she began singing in a low tone of voice a rather indecent song, of which she played the music without any difficulty.

Gaston knew the song, and began to join in it, so that they sang a sort of duet.

"Do not sing such abominable songs," said I to Marguerite in a friendly tone of entreaty.

"Oh! how modest you are," she replied smiling, at the same time giving me her hand.

"It is not on my account, but on yours."

Marguerite made a gesture, which seemed to imply: "It is a long time since I have had anything to do with modesty."

At this moment Nanine re-entered the room.

"Is supper laid?" asked Marguerite.

"It will be ready in a moment, Madame."

"By-the-bye," remarked Prudence, "you have not seen the rooms. Come, and I will show them to you."

You have visited them, and you know that the drawing-room was magnificent.

Marguerite accompanied us a little way; then she called Gaston, and went with him into the dining-room to see if supper was ready.

"Hello!" exclaimed Prudence, as she took from a bracket a small Dresden statue. "I did not know you had this little man."

"What little man?"

"That small shepherd holding a bird-cage."

"Take it if you like."

"Oh! I should be afraid of robbing you."

"I was about to give it to my maid. I think it hideous; but, if you like it, you can have it."

Prudence looked only at the present, and not at the man-

ner in which it was given. She put the little man away, and took me into the dressing-room; then, showing me two miniatures hanging opposite one another, she said:

"This one is Count de G——, who has been very much in love with Marguerite; it was he who brought her out. Do you know him?"

"No; and who is that one?" said I, pointing to the other miniature.

"That is the little Viscount de L——; he was compelled to leave her."

"Why?"

"Because he was nearly ruined. He doted on Marguerite."

"And, no doubt, she also loved him?"

"She is such an extraordinary girl one never knows what to think. On the day he went away she visited the theatre, as usual, and yet she shed tears when he left her."

At this moment Nanine came to tell us that supper was ready.

When we entered the supper-room Marguerite was leaning against the wall, and Gaston was holding her hands, and addressing her in a low tone of voice.

"You are mad," I heard Marguerite say. "You know that I won't have anything to say to you. A man does not ask a woman like me to love him, after knowing her for two years. Such girls as I am give our love at once or not at all. Come, gentlemen, let's go to supper."

And escaping from Gaston's grasp, Marguerite made him sit at her right, and myself at her left. Then she said to Nanine:

"Before you sit down, tell the servants not to admit any one."

This order was given at one o'clock in the morning. We laughed, drank, and ate heartily. In a few moments

we were all as merry as possible, and now and then some jokes were made, amidst shouts of laughter from Nanine, Prudence, and Marguerite, which are considered funny by a certain class of people, but always soil the lips of those who make them. Gaston seemed to enjoy himself; he was young, and his heart was in the right place, but his mind had been somewhat warped by his early habits. At one moment I felt half inclined to drown my thoughts, to care no more nor trouble myself about whatever was going on, and to be as merry at that supper as the others were. But little by little I felt isolated amidst all this noise; my glass remained untouched, and I became almost sad whilst looking at this beautiful creature of twenty, who drank and talked like a porter, and laughed all the louder the broader the jest was.

Nevertheless, this gayety, this talk, and this drinking which, in others, would have appeared to me the result of dissipation and force of habit, seemed in Marguerite's case to be caused by a feverish desire to forget, and by her nervous irritability. At each glass of champagne she drank her cheeks reddened with a feverish glow; and her cough, which was slight at the beginning of supper, became, at last, troublesome enough to compel her to lean her head against the back of her chair and hold her chest with both her hands every time she wanted to cough.

I felt sorry to think that such daily excesses would severely injure so delicate a creature.

At last what I dreaded and foresaw came to pass. Towards the end of the supper, poor Marguerite, attacked by a far more violent fit of coughing than any she had had since I had been in the room, and which seemed to tear her chest to pieces, turned purple, closed her eyes with the pain, and pressed her napkin to her lips, which was stained by a few

drops of blood. Then she rose and ran into her dressing-room.

"What's the matter with Marguerite?" asked Gaston.

"She has laughed too much, and is spitting blood," said Prudence; "but that is nothing, for she does it every day. Leave her alone. She likes that best."

But I could not bear to remain seated, and to the great astonishment of Prudence and Nanine, who called me back, I went to see how Marguerite was.

CHAPTER X.

THE room to which she had retired was lit by a single candle placed upon the table. Lying upon a large couch with her dress unfastened, she pressed one hand to her heart while the other hung by her side. On the table was a silver basin, half filled with water, and this water was streaked with blood.

Marguerite, very pale, and with lips apart, was panting for breath. At times her chest heaved, and she uttered a deep sigh, which seemed to relieve her somewhat and to give her a few minutes of ease.

I drew near, but she did not move; I seated myself beside her, and took her hand which was resting upon the couch.

"Oh! is it you?" she said, smiling.

My countenance must have betrayed my anxiety, for she added:

"Are you also ill?"

"No, but you are. Are you still in pain?"

"Very little," and she dried with her handkerchief the tears which the cough had brought to her eyes. "I am used to it now."

"You will kill yourself, Madame," I said, with a voice that showed my emotion; "I wish I were a friend or a relative, that I might prevent you from injuring yourself as you do."

"It really is not worth the trouble, and you should not alarm yourself," she replied, with some bitterness. "See how the others concern themselves about me. They

know that nothing can be done for such an illness as mine."

She rose, and taking the candle, placed it on the mantelpiece, and looked at herself in the glass.

"How pale I am!" she remarked, as she fastened anew her dress, and passed her fingers through her hair which had become undone. "Well, never mind! Let us go back to supper. Will you come?"

But I remained seated and did not stir.

She understood the emotion which I felt, for she drew near me, and offered me her hand, saying:

"There now, come."

I took her hand and raising it to my lips dropped upon it, in spite of myself, some tears which I had long tried to suppress.

"How childish you are!" she said, taking a seat beside me, "you are weeping. What is the matter?"

"I must appear very silly to you, but what I have just seen pains me deeply."

"You are very kind; but what can I do? I cannot sleep, and I must amuse myself in some way; and besides, what does it matter if there is in the world one more or less of such girls as I am? The doctors tell me that the blood I spit comes from my bronchial tubes; I pretend to believe them; that is all that I can do for them."

"Listen to me, Marguerite!" I exclaimed, with a warmth which I could not repress. "I do not know what influence you are going to exercise upon my future; but this I do know, that at the present moment there is not one person in the world, not even my sister, for whom I feel as I do for you. It has been so ever since I first saw you. For Heaven's sake, let me beg you to take care of yourself and not lead the life you do."

"If I were to take care of myself, I should die. That

which keeps me up is the feverish life I lead; besides, it is all very well for ladies in society, who have families and friends, to take care of themselves; but we are abandoned when we can no longer minister to the vanity or the pleasures of our lovers, and lonely days are succeeded by more lonely nights. I know it, for when I was for two months confined to my bed no one called on me after the first three weeks."

"I am almost a stranger to you, it is true," I replied, "but, if you have no objection, I will nurse you like a brother; I will not leave you, and I will cure you. Then, when you have recovered your strength, you shall, if you like, resume the life you now lead; but I am sure that you would much prefer a quiet existence which would render you happier, and preserve your beauty."

"You think thus to-night, because wine makes you melancholy, but you would not be as patient as you pretend to be."

"Permit me to remind you, Marguerite, that you have been ill for two months, and that during those two months I called every day to inquire after you."

"That is true. But why did you not come up?"

"Because I did not know you, then, well enough."

"Do people stand upon ceremony with a girl like me?"

"A man should always be polite to a lady; at least that is my opinion."

"And so you will take care of me?"

"Yes."

"You will stay with me every day?"

"Yes."

"And every night also?"

"As long as I do not weary you."

"And what do you call that?"

"Self-sacrifice."

"And whence arises this self-sacrifice?"

"From an irresistible sympathy which I feel for you."

"What you mean is that you are in love with me; say so at once, it is much simpler."

"It is possible; but if I am to tell you so some time or other, I shall not do so to-night."

"It would be much better if you never told me so at all."

"Why?"

"Because from such a declaration can only result two things."

"And those two things are?"

"Either I refuse to listen to you, and then you will be angry; or I return your love, and then you will have a melancholy mistress, who is nervous, ill, sad, or gay, with a gaiety more melancholy than sadness itself; a woman who spits blood and spends a hundred thousand francs a year. This may be all very well for a wealthy old man like the Duke, but would be very tiresome for a young man like you; and to prove to you that I speak the truth, let me tell you that each youthful lover whom I have ever had very soon left me."

I made no answer; I listened. This frankness, which was almost a confession; this wretched life of which I caught a glimpse through the golden veil which hid it, and from the reality of which the poor girl sought refuge in dissipation, excitement and late hours, all this produced such an impression on me that I could not utter a single word.

"Come," continued Marguerite, "we are talking nonsense; give me your hand and let us go back to supper. They will be wondering what has become of us."

"Go back if you like; but I will ask you to allow me to remain here."

"Why?"

"Because your merriment distresses me too much."

"Very well, then; I will be sad."

"Listen, Marguerite; permit me to say something that no doubt has been told you often, and which you may perhaps not believe, as you have been accustomed to hear it repeatedly, but which, nevertheless, is true, and which I shall never again repeat to you."

"What are you going to tell me?" she asked, smiling somewhat like a young mother who is listening to a foolish saying of her child.

"I wish to tell you that since I have seen you, I don't know how or why, you have become part and parcel of my very existence; that I have endeavored to drive your image from my thoughts, but that it has constantly returned; that this very day when I meet you again, after not having seen you for two years, you exercise a still greater influence on my heart and mind; and that now, as you have received me, now that I konw you, now that I perceive how eccentric you are, you have become indispensable to me; and that I shall become mad, not only if you do not love me, but if you do not allow me to love you."

"Unfortunate young man, must I say to you what Madame D—— said to one of her admirers; 'you must be very rich, then?' You are not aware that I spend six or seven thousand francs a month, and that my spending such a sum has become necessary to my very existence. You do not know, then, my poor friend, that I should ruin you in an incredibly short time, and that your family would legally prevent your handling any money in order to punish you for living with such a creature as I am. Love me if you like as a friend, but not otherwise. Come and see me, and we will laugh and talk together; but do not ex-

aggerate to yourself my good qualities, for I really have not many of them. Your heart is in the right place; you need some one to love you; you are too young and too sensitive to live amongst us. Make love to a married woman. You see that I am a good girl and that I speak frankly to you."

"What the deuce are you about?" exclaimed Prudence, who came upon us unawares and appeared on the threshold of the room with her hair in disorder and her dress disarranged. I recognized in this the hand of my friend Gaston.

"We were talking sensibly," said Marguerite; "leave us for a moment, and we will join you presently."

"Very well, very well; talk away, my children," said Prudence, withdrawing and banging the door, as if to emphasize her words.

"It is agreed, then," said Marguerite when we were alone, "that you are not to love me any more."

"Then I will leave France."

"Are you so much in love with me?"

I had advanced too far to retract, and, moreover, this girl almost drove me beside myself. This medley of gaiety and sadness, of candor and prostitution; this very illness which developed her susceptibility as well as her nervous excitement; all this made me feel that if from the first moment I did not master this forgetful and fitful temperament Marguerite would be lost to me forever.

"Come, now, are you really in earnest in what you are saying?"

"Very much in earnest."

"But why did you not speak to me sooner?"

"When could I have done so?"

"The day after you were introduced to me at the 'Opéra Comique.'"

"I thought you would not have received me very well if then I had called to see you."

"Why?"

"Because I had behaved stupidly the previous evening."

"That is true. But you already loved me at that time?"

"Yes."

"Which did not prevent you from going home and sleeping very quietly, after having been at the 'Opéra.' We know what these grand passions are."

"You are mistaken. Do you know what I really did on the night I saw you at the 'Opéra Comique?'"

"No."

"I went to the 'Café Anglais' and stood waiting at the door. Then I followed the carriage in which you and your three friends were, and when I saw you enter your apartment alone I was very happy."

Marguerite began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?"

"At nothing."

"Tell me, I entreat you, or I shall believe you are still making fun of me."

"You will not be angry?"

"What right have I to be so?"

"Well, then, if you must know, I had a good reason for entering my apartment alone."

"May I know that reason?"

"Somebody was waiting for me."

Had she stabbed me to the heart I could not have felt the blow more severely. I rose and offered her my hand.

"Adieu!" I said.

"I knew that you would be annoyed," she replied;

"men are always very anxious to learn what will vex them most."

"But I assure you," I added, coldly, for I wished to convince her that I was forever cured of my passion; "I assure you that I am not angry. It was very natural for some one to be waiting for you, and it is also very natural for me to say good-bye at three o'clock in the morning."

"Is some one then waiting for you at home?"

"No; but I must go."

"Adieu, then."

"You dismiss me?"

"Not at all."

"Why do you pain me thus?"

"How have I pained you?"

"By telling me that somebody was then waiting for you."

"I could not help laughing at the idea that you were so pleased at seeing me enter the house alone, when there was such a good reason for it."

"Often a man is pleased with a trifle; and it is cruel to destroy his pleasure, when by letting it alone he is happier than he was before."

"But to whom do you imagine you are talking? I am neither a maiden nor a duchess. I only made your acquaintance to-day, and have not to account to you for my actions. Suppose even that I might, one day, become your mistress, you cannot be ignorant of the fact that I have had other lovers. If already you show yourself jealous now, what will it be afterward, if that 'afterward' should ever come to pass? I never met a man like you!"

"Because you never met a man who loved you as I do."

"Come now, frankly, you really love me so very much?"

"As much as it is possible to love, I think."

"And when did this love begin?"

"On a certain day when I saw you come out of your carriage, and enter Susse's shop, some three years ago."

"All this is very fine! What can I do to show my gratitude for such an affection?"

"Love me a little," I replied, whilst my heart throbbed so violently that it almost prevented my speaking; for in spite of her semi-sarcastic smiles all the time we had been conversing, I imagined that Marguerite began to share my feelings, and that the hour drew near I had waited for so long.

"What am I to do with the Duke?"

"What Duke?"

"My jealous old friend."

"He will know nothing of it."

"But if he should know?"

"Then he will forgive you."

"Alas! no; he will abandon me, and then what will become of me?"

"But you did not scruple to run such a risk for another man."

"How do you know that?"

"Because you told your servant to admit no one to-night."

"That is true; but that gentleman is a friend on whom I can rely."

"But for whom you do not seem to care much, as you close your door against him at such an early hour."

"You ought not to reproach me, as I did this only to receive you and your friend."

I had gradually drawn near to Marguerite, and clasping my arms aroung her waist, gently pressed her slight form.

"If you but knew how I love you," I whispered to her.

"Is that quite true?"

"I swear it to you."

"Well, then, if you promise to obey all my wishes, without saying a single word, without making any remark, or without questioning me, I may, perhaps, return your love."

"I promise to do everything you wish."

"But I give you fair warning that I must be free to do exactly as I like, without giving you the slightest explanation. I have been for a long time on the lookout for a young man pliable, fond of me without distrusting me, and who could be loved without claiming my love as his right. I have never been able to find such a one. Men, instead of being satisfied when we grant them for a considerable time that which they hardly could have hoped to obtain once, demand from their mistress an account of the past, the present, and even of the future. In proportion as they become accustomed to her they seek to subdue her, and they become the more exacting the more she indulges them. If I decide to take again a lover he must possess three very rare qualities: he must have confidence in me, be submissive and discreet."

"Very well! I will be all you wish."

"We shall see."

"And when shall we see?"

"By-and-by."

"Why not now?"

"Because," said Marguerite, getting up from the couch, and taking from a large bouquet of red camellias, which had been sent to her in the morning, a single flower which she put in my buttonhole, "because it is not always possible to execute treaties on the day of their signature."

There was no difficulty in understanding that.

"And when may I see you again?" said I, clasping her in my arms.

"When this camellia will have changed its color."

"And when will that be?"

"To-morrow between eleven o'clock and midnight. Are you satisfied?"

"Can you ask me!"

"Not a word of this to your friend, nor to Prudence, nor to any one."

"You may depend on me."

"Now embrace me and let us return to the drawing-room."

I did so; she arranged her hair, and we left the room, she singing, and I half mad with joy.

In the drawing-room, pausing for a moment, she whispered to me:

"It must seem very strange to you that I accept you so readily; but should you like to know why?

"It is," she continued, taking my hand, and placing it upon her heart, which throbbed and palpitated violently—"it is because, having to live a shorter time than others, I have promised myself to live faster."

"Do not speak thus, I entreat you."

"Don't distress yourself," she said, laughing; "however short a time I may have to live, I shall live longer than you will love me."

And she entered the supper-room singing.

"Where is Nanine?" she said, on seeing Gaston and Prudence alone.

"She is asleep in your room, waiting till you are ready to go to bed," answered Prudence.

"Poor girl! I am killing her. Come, gentlemen, it is time for you to go home."

Ten minutes after Gaston and I took our leave. Mar-

guerite pressed my hand as she said good-bye to me, and remained with Prudence.

"Well!" said Gaston, when we were in the street, "what did you say to Marguerite?"

"She is an angel, and I am madly in love with her."

"I thought as much. Have you told her so?"

"Yes."

"And has she promised to believe you?"

"No."

"Then, she did not behave like Prudence."

"Has she promised you anything?"

"She has behaved much better, my dear fellow. You would hardly believe it; but that buxom Duvernoy is a very fine woman still."

CHAPTER XI.

At this stage of his narrative Armand paused.

"Will you be kind enough to shut the window?" he said to me; "I begin to feel cold. Meanwhile, I will get into bed."

I shut the window. Armand, who was still very weak, took off his dressing-gown and went to bed, whilst he rested his head for a few minutes on the pillow as if fatigued by a long walk, or agitated by painful recollections.

"You have, perhaps, talked too much," I remarked. "Do you wish me to leave you, so that you can have a nap? You can tell me the rest of this story another day."

"Does it weary you?"

"On the contrary."

"Then I shall go on with it. Even if you left me alone, I could not go to sleep."

When I came back to my rooms, he resumed, without hesitating for a moment, for he still remembered perfectly all the details, I did not go to bed, but began to reflect upon what had just happened. My meeting with Marguerite, my being introduced to her, the promise she had made me, all this had been so rapid and so unexpected, that now and then I thought I was dreaming. It was not, however, the first time that a girl like Marguerite had promised to meet a man the very next day after his making love to her.

It was in vain that these thoughts came into my head; the first impression produced on me by my future mistress

was so powerful that it could not be effaced. I persisted in not seeing in her a girl like others, and with the vanity, which almost all men possess, I was ready to believe she felt irresistibly the same affection for me that I felt for her.

Nevertheless, I was aware of several examples which did not confirm this belief, and often I had been told that Marguerite's love was a commodity more or less expensive according to the season.

But how, also, on the other hand, could I reconcile this reputation with her continually refusing to accept the young Count whom I had met at her house? You will say that he did not please her, and that, as she was splendidly kept by the Duke, she would decidedly take a lover whom she would like if she were to choose another. Why then would she have nothing to say to Gaston, who was charming, intelligent, and rich; and why did she seem to prefer me whom she had thought so ridiculous the first time she saw me?

It is true that something may happen in a minute that affects women more than a whole year's courtship.

Of those who were present at supper, I was the only one who had shown any feeling when she left the table. I had followed her, so stirred up by emotion that I was not able to hide it, and I had shed tears when kissing her hand. These circumstances, as well as my daily visits during the two months she had been ill, might have made her see in me a personage quite different from those people she had hitherto known, and perhaps she had argued with herself that she might grant to an affection expressed in such a manner what she had so often granted, so that it was no longer of any importance to her.

All these suppositions, as you perceive, were probable enough; but whatever might have been the reason of her

promise, one thing was certain, that she had promised to meet me.

Now, I was in love with Marguerite; I was going to stay with her, and I could ask for nothing more. However, I repeat it, although she was a demirep, and perhaps to make it all the more poetic, I had so little expected that my love should be responded to, that, the nearer the moment approached which would put an end to mere expectation, the more I began to doubt.

I did not close my eyes the whole night.

I no longer recognized myself; I was half mad. Now, I did not think myself handsome enough, nor rich enough, nor elegant enough to be the lover of such a woman; then I felt myself puffed up with pride at the idea of becoming her lover; again I began to fear that Marguerite had only for me a caprice which would last a few days; and, having a foreboding of evil and of a prompt dismissal, I said to myself that perhaps I should act wiser if I were not to go to her in the evening, but leave town at once, after sending her a letter to tell her what I feared. Then again, there was no limit to my expectations, whilst my confidence was unbounded. My dreams of the future were incredible; I said to myself that I would cure this girl physically, as well as morally; that I would pass all my life with her; and that her love would render me happier than the affection of the chastest maiden.

In fact I cannot repeat to you the innumerable thoughts that welled from my heart to my brain, and which gradually passed away in the sleep which overcame me at daybreak.

When I awoke it was two o'clock. The weather was very fine. I cannot remember that life had ever before appeared to me so beautiful and so bountiful. Recollections of the previous evening presented themselves to my

mind without any shadows, without any obstacles, and gaily escorted by the expectations of the evening to come. I dressed myself in a hurry; I was happy, and quite capable of performing the noblest actions. From time to time my heart leaped in my bosom with joy and with love. A gentle feverish agitation was stirred within me; I no longer troubled myself with the reasons which had preoccupied me before I fell asleep; I saw but the result, and only thought of the hour when I was again to behold Marguerite.

It was impossible for me to stay at home. My rooms appeared too small to contain my happiness, and all nature was not too large to give vent to my feelings.

I went out.

I passed along the Rue d'Antin; Marguerite's brougham awaited her at the door. I walked towards the Champs-Elysées. Without knowing any one, I liked everybody I met.

How kind-hearted love makes a man!

I walked for an hour from the "Chevaux de Marly" to the "rond-point," and from the "rond-point" to the "Chevaux de Marly." I saw in the distance Marguerite's carriage; I did not know it, but guessed it was hers.

At the moment of turning the corner of the Champs-Elysées, she ordered the carriage to stop, and a tall young man left some friends with whom he had been conversing to come and talk to her.

They chatted for a few minutes; the young man rejoined his friends, the horses went on; and I, who had approached the group, recognized in the one who had spoken to Marguerite the Count de G——, whose portrait I had seen and whom Prudence had pointed out to me as the man to whom Marguerite owed her position.

The night before she had given orders not to admit him,

and I supposed that she stopped her carriage to let him know why she had done so, whilst I was hoping at the same time that she would have found some new excuse for not receiving him this evening.

I do not know how I spent the rest of the day; I walked, smoked and conversed; but at ten o'clock at night I could not recollect what I had said and whom I had met.

All that I remember is that I went back to my rooms; that I passed three hours in dressing myself and that I looked a hundred times at my clock and my watch, which, unluckily, told precisely the same story.

When it struck half-past ten I said to myself that it was time to go.

I lived then in the Rue de Provence; I went along the Rue du Mont-Blanc, crossed the Boulevard, took the Rue Louis-le-Grand, the Rue de Port-Mahon and the Rue d'Antin. I looked up at Marguerite's windows.

They were lit up.

I rang the bell.

I asked the "portier" if Mademoiselle Gautier was at home.

He replied that she never came home before eleven or quarter-past.

I looked at my watch.

I thought that I had walked very gently, but I had not taken five minutes to come from the Rue de Provence to Marguerite's house.

Then I paced up and down the street, which was without shops and quite deserted at this hour.

In half an hour Marguerite arrived, stepped out of her brougham and looked around her as if she wanted to see some one.

The carriage went slowly away; for the stables and coach-house were not on the same premises where she lived.

Just as she was going to ring the bell I drew near and said to her:

"Good-evening!"

"Oh, is it you?" she replied, in a tone which did not show that she felt very pleased in seeing me.

"Did you not give me permission to come and pay you a visit to-night?"

"You are right, I had forgotten it."

These words effaced all the reflections I had made during the morning, as well as all my hopes for the future. However, I began to get accustomed to her peculiarities, and did not go away, as I certainly should have done formerly.

We went into the house.

Nanine had opened the door beforehand.

"Has Prudence come back?" asked Marguerite.

"No, Madame."

"Go and tell her servant that she is to come to me as soon as she returns. But before you go put out the lamp in the drawing-room, and if any one calls say that I have not yet returned and that I shall not be home this evening."

She was preoccupied by something, and, perhaps, annoyed by my untimely visit. I did not know what countenance to assume nor what to say. Marguerite went towards her bed-room and I remained where I was.

"Follow me," she said.

She took off her bonnet and her velvet cloak and threw them on the bed; then she dropped into a large easy-chair near the fire, which was always kindled in her room till the very beginning of summer, and said to me, as she played with her watch-chain:

"Well! what news have you to tell me?"

"No news at all, except that I was wrong to come this evening."

"Why?"

"Because you appear to be vexed, and, no doubt, I annoy you."

"You do not annoy me, only I am ill. I have been in pain the whole day; I did not sleep all night, and I have a frightful headache."

"Shall I leave the room so that you can get into bed?"

"Oh! you can remain. If I want to go to bed I can very well do so while you are here."

Just then some one rang the bell.

"Who is coming here now?" she said, with a gesture of impatience.

A few minutes afterwards the bell rang again.

"Is there no one to open the door? I shall have to do so myself."

She rose from her chair saying:

"Wait here for me."

She went to the outer-door, which I heard her open. I was listening.

The gentleman to whom she had opened the door stepped into the dining-room. At the first words he spoke I recognized the voice of the young Count de N——.

"How are you this evening?" he asked.

"I am ill," abruptly answered Marguerite.

"Am I in your way?"

"Perhaps so."

"What a nice reception you give me! What have I done to you, my dear Marguerite?"

"My dear friend, you have done nothing to me. I am ill, and I want to go to bed; you will, therefore, do me the kindness to leave. It worries me to death not to be able to come home of an evening without seeing you appear five minutes afterwards. What do you want? That I should become your mistress? I have already told you a hundred times that I refuse, that you irritate me most horribly, and

that you had better pay your addresses to some one else. To-night I repeat it to you for the last time: I will have nothing to say to you. Do you understand that? Ah, here is Nanine, who has just come in; she will show you a light. Good-night."

And without adding a word, without listening to what the young man was muttering, Marguerite returned, and violently slammed the door. A few minutes afterwards Nanine also came into the room.

"Once for all," said Marguerite to her, "you will always tell that stupid fellow that I am not at home, or do not wish to receive him. I am tired, at last, of perpetually seeing people who come to ask me for the same thing, pay me, and then believe they no longer owe me anything. If women only knew what it meant they would sooner become lady's maids than enter our shameful profession. But no; we are led away by the idea of having fine dresses, carriages, and diamonds; we believe what is told us, for even prostitution has its belief, and little by little we wear out our heart, our body, and our beauty; we are dreaded as if we were wild beasts and despised as if we were pariahs; we are only surrounded by persons who always take from us more than they give, and some fine day we crawl away to die like dogs, after having ruined others, and ruined ourselves as well."

"Madame, pray calm yourself," said Nanine; "you are nervous this evening."

"This dress is too tight for me," said Marguerite, unfastening it, "give me a dressing-gown. Well! where is Prudence?"

"She has not yet returned, but they will send her to you as soon as she comes in."

"Even Prudence," continued Marguerite, taking off her dress, and putting on a white dressing-gown, "knows very

well to come to me when she wants me, but does not care to do me a service unless I make it worth her while. She is aware that this evening I am waiting for her answer, that I must have it and am uneasy, and yet I am quite sure she has gone gadding about without troubling herself about me."

"Perhaps she has been detained."

"Give me some punch."

"You will make yourself ill again," remarked Nanine.

"All the better. Bring me also some fruit, a 'pâté,' or the wing of a chicken; something directly! I am hungry."

I cannot tell you the impression this scene produced on me, but you can guess it.

"You will stay and have some supper with me," she said; "meanwhile take up a book; I am going to my dressing-room for a minute."'

She took one of the candlesticks, opened a door at the foot of her bed, and disappeared.

My thoughts reverted to the kind of life this girl was leading, and a feeling of pity was added to my love for her.

I walked up and down the room, all the while communing with myself, when Prudence entered.

"What! you here?" she said; "where is Marguerite?"

"In her dressing-room."

"I will wait for her. I say, do you know she likes you very much?"

"I was not aware of it."

"She has not told you anything about it?"

"No, she has not."

"Why are you here?"

"I came to pay her a visit."

"At midnight?"

"Why not?"

"You are jesting."

"She has even received me very badly."

"She will now receive you better."

"Do you think so?"

"I bring her good news."

"There is no harm in that. What did she say to you about me, and when?"

"Yesterday evening, or rather this morning, after you and your friend left. By-the-by, how is your friend? Is his name not Gaston R——?"

"Yes," I said, without being able to keep from smiling, remembering what Gaston had told me, and seeing that Prudence scarcely knew his name.

"He is a nice young fellow. What does he do?"

"He has about twenty-five thousand francs a year."

"Oh! indeed. Well, to come back to you; Marguerite questioned me about you. She asked me who you were, what you did, what women you had been courting; in fact, everything a woman can ask about a man of your age. I told her all that I knew, and even said that you were a very nice young fellow."

"Thank you. Now, tell me, what did she want you to do for her last night?"

"Nothing at all. She simply wanted to get rid of the young Count; but to-day I had to go somewhere for her, and I bring her an answer now."

At this moment Marguerite came out of her dressing-room, wearing a smart little cap with bows of yellow ribbon.

She looked charming.

Her bare feet were stuck in a pair of satin slippers; and she was trimming her nails.

"Well," she said, on seeing Prudence, "have you seen the Duke?"

"I have."

"What did he say to you?"

"He has supplied me with what you wanted."

"With how much?"

"Six thousand francs."

"Have you got the money?"

"Yes."

"Did he appear to be annoyed?"

"No."

"Poor man."

These two words were uttered in a manner impossible to render. Marguerite took the notes which Prudence handed to her.

"It was high time," she observed. "My dear Prudence, are you in want of money?"

"You know, my child, that we are two days from the fifteenth; if you could lend me three or four hundred francs, you would do me a service."

"Send in the morning; it is too late to get change now."

"You won't forget?"

"Make yourself easy. Will you stay to supper with us?"

"No, Charles is waiting for me at home."

"You are still in love with him?"

"I am raving about him, my dear. Till to-morrow. Good-bye, Armand."

Madame Duvernoy went away.

Marguerite opened one of the cupboards underneath an "étagère," and threw the bank-notes into it.

"You will permit me to lie down?" she asked, smiling, and walking towards the bed.

"I not only permit it, I beg you to do so."

She turned back the lace coverlet, and laid down.

"Now," she said, "come and sit near me, and let us converse."

Prudence was right; the answer she had brought to Marguerite had put her in a better temper.

"You will pardon me for having been so cantankerous this evening," she said, taking my hand.

"I am ready to pardon you a great deal more."

"And you love me?"

"I am madly in love with you."

"Notwithstanding my bad temper?"

"Notwithstanding everything."

"Will you swear it to me?"

"Yes," I said in a low tone.

Nanine then entered with plates, a cold chicken, a bottle of claret, and some strawberries.

"I did not make any punch," said Nanine; "claret is much better for you. Am I not right, sir?"

"Certainly," I answered, still greatly moved by Marguerite's last words, and looking at her with eyes full of passion.

"That will do," she said. "Put all these things on the little table, and draw it up close to the bed; we will help ourselves. You have been kept up these three nights, Nanine; you must want to go to bed; have a good rest; I don't require anything more."

"Shall I lock the door?"

"I should think so; and, above all, tell them not to let any one in to-morrow morning before twelve."

CHAPTER XII.

At five o'clock in the morning, when daylight began to peep through the curtains, Marguerite said to me:

"Forgive me for driving you away, but it is not my fault; the Duke comes every morning, and if they tell him I am asleep, he will wait, perhaps, till I awake."

I took hold of her head whilst her dishevelled hair was falling about her, and giving her a last kiss, asked:

"When shall I see you again?"

"Listen," she said, "take the little gilded key which is on the mantelpiece; go and open this door, put back the key in its place, and go away. During the day you will receive a letter with my commands; for you know you are to obey me blindly."

"Suppose I were already to ask you for something?"

"What is it?"

"Permission to keep this key."

"I never gave that key to any one."

"Well, give it to me! for I swear to you no one has ever loved you as I do."

"Well, then, take it; but I tell you frankly it depends entirely on me if it be of any use to you."

"How so?"

"There are bolts inside the door."

"How cruel you are!"

"I will have them removed."

"You love me then a little?"

"I do not understand how it is, but I think I do; now go away, I am very sleepy."

We remained a moment in each other's arms, and then I took my departure.

There was no one in the streets. The great city was still sleeping and felt less close than it would be a few hours later on, when it would resound with the busy hum of men.

It seemed as if this sleeping town belonged to me. I tried to recollect the names of those men I had hitherto envied; but I could not recall one without finding myself happier than he was.

To be loved by a chaste maiden, to be the first to reveal to her the strange mystery of love, is certainly a great happiness; but it is the simplest thing in the world. To gain possession of a heart unaccustomed to be attacked is to enter a town not fortified, and without any garrison. Education, a feeling of duty and family affection are watchful sentinels; but no sentinels are so vigilant as not to be deceived by a young girl of sixteen to whom, through the voice of the man she adores, nature gives those first lessons of passion which are so much the more ardent as they seem the more pure.

The more a young girl believes in what is right, the more readily she abandons herself, if not to her lover, at least to love; because not being distrustful she is without strength. To make himself beloved by such a girl is a triumph which any man of twenty-five may obtain whenever he likes. And this is so true that you will observe that young girls are watched over with great care, and surrounded by ever so many bulwarks. Convents have no walls high enough, mothers no locks strong enough, religion no observances long enough to confine all those charming birds in cages, into which people do not even take the trouble to throw a few flowers. Therefore they are longing to see this world which is hidden from them; they suppose

that it is very tempting; they are ready to listen to the first voice which, through the bars of their prison, tells them its secrets, and to bless the hand which is the first to lift the corner of the mysterious veil.

But to be really loved by a courtesan is a victory far more difficult. With such women the body has worn out the soul; sensuousness has burned up the heart; dissipation has hardened every feeling. They have long been familiar with the words a man utters to them; they are acquainted with the means he employs, and have bartered the very love which they inspire. They love as a profession, and not from impulse; they are more securely guarded by their calculations than a virgin is by her mother and her convent. Thus they have invented the word "caprice" for that non-mercenary love to which they treat themselves now and then as an excuse, a repose, or a consolation; like those usurers who, after fleecing a great number of people, think to atone for everything by lending one day or other twenty francs to some poor wretch who is dying of hunger without asking any interest or any acknowledgment of the debt.

Moreover, when Heaven permits a courtesan to feel any love, that very love which seems at first a sort of forgiveness becomes almost always a chastisement. There is no absolution without penance. When a woman whose past career is a reproach to her finds herself suddenly haunted by a love profound, sincere, irresistible, of which she could never have believed herself capable; when she has acknowledged her love, what an absolute sway the beloved exercises over her! How strong he feels himself, because he has the cruel right of saying to her, "You feel the power of love now, but you formerly pretended to have the same feeling for money."

Then she knows not what proofs to give of her affection. Some fable relates how a child, after having for a long

time amused himself by shouting in the fields for help, and so disturbing the laborers, was one day devoured by a bear, because those whom he had deceived so often paid no attention to the cries he raised through genuine fear. It is thus with these unhappy girls when they really love; they have so often told so many falsehoods that people will no longer believe them, and in the midst of their remorse they are consumed by their very passion.

Hence those noble instances of self-sacrifice and of austere repentance, of which some of them have given examples.

But when the man who inspires this redeeming sentiment is generous enough to accept it without remembering the past, when he wholly gives himself up to that sentiment, when, in short, he loves as he is beloved, then that man exhausts at once all earthly emotions, and after such a passion his heart will remain forever closed to any other love.

I did not make these reflections that same morning after returning to my rooms; they could have only been the presentiment of what was about to happen, and in spite of my love for Marguerite I foresaw no such consequences. I make these reflections now, because everything is irrevocably finished and they are the natural outcome of what has taken place.

But to return to the first day of this "liaison." When I came back to my rooms I was wild with delight; I remembered that the barriers placed by my imagination between Marguerite and myself had disappeared; that I was her lover and occupied, more or less, all her thoughts; that I had in my pocket the key of her room, and the right of making use of that key; and I was glad to live, proud of myself, and pleased with my lot in this world.

On a certain day a young man passes through a street;

he brushes against a young woman, looks at her, turns round, and passes on; he does not know this woman; she has pleasures, passions, sorrows, which he does not share. He does not exist for her, and, perhaps if he spoke to her she would make fun of him as Marguerite had made fun of me. Weeks, months, years flow on, and all at once, after they have each followed their destiny in various directions, the logic of fate brings them again face to face. Then this woman becomes the mistress of this man and loves him. How? Why? Their two existences now make but one; their intimacy had scarcely begun when it appears to them to have always existed, and every other event that happened before is effaced from the memory of this pair of lovers. We must acknowledge that this is strange.

As for me, I no longer remembered how I had lived before the preceding day. My whole being was steeped in joy at the recollection of the words exchanged during the first night. Either Marguerite was clever in deceiving, or she felt for me one of those sudden passions revealed in the first kiss, and which sometimes die as suddenly as they arise.

The more I reflected on it the more I said to myself that Marguerite had no cause to feign a passion which she did not feel; I also said to myself that women have two ways of loving, which may spring from one another: they love with the heart and with the senses. A woman often takes a lover, impelled to it by her temperament; and, without having expected it, she learns the mystery of immaterial love, and no longer lives except through her feelings; often a young girl who imagines marriage only to be the union of two pure affections receives the sudden revelation of physical love; this energetic conclusion of the most chaste impressions of the soul

I fell asleep whilst occupied with these thoughts. My servant woke me and handed me a letter from Marguerite which contained the following words:

"These are my commands: Come this evening to the 'Vaudeville,' between the third and fourth acts.—M. G."

I locked the note in one of the drawers of my table, so as always to have the reality at hand, and as a proof that I was not dreaming, as I sometimes fancied I was.

She did not tell me to come and visit her in the daytime, so I did not dare to present myself at her house; but I was so anxious to meet her before the evening that I went to the Champs-Elysées where, as on the day before, I saw her pass and get out of her carriage.

I was at the "Vaudeville" at seven.

Never before had I entered a theatre so early.

All the boxes became gradually occupied except one on the ground-tier near the stage, which remained empty.

The third act had begun. The door of this box, on which I kept my eyes almost constantly fixed, opened, and Marguerite appeared.

She immediately advanced to the front, glanced at the stalls, saw me, and thanked me with a look.

She seemed wonderfully handsome that evening.

Was I the cause of her looking so well? Did she love me enough to believe that the more beautiful she looked the happier I should be? I was not yet aware of it, but if such had been her intention she completely succeeded; for when the audience saw her they whispered among themselves, and the actor who was then on the stage gazed at the woman who had disturbed the spectators by her mere appearance. And I had the key of her apartment, and in another three or four hours she would again be mine.

People blame men who ruin themselves for actresses and demireps. What astonishes me is that men do not commit twenty times more follies for them. You must have led such a life as I have to know how the flattering compliments which these women daily pay their lovers firmly root into the heart, the passion—for there exists no other name for it—which the latter feel.

Prudence took her place in the box, and a gentleman, whom I recognized as the Count de G——, seated himself at the back.

On seeing him I felt my blood freeze in my veins.

Doubtless Marguerite perceived the impression produced by the presence of this gentleman in her box; for she smiled on me anew, and, turning her back on him, appeared to listen very attentively to the first piece. At the close of the piece she turned round and said a few words to the Count, who left the box; then Marguerite beckoned to me to come and see her.

"Good-evening," said she on my entering; and she gave me her hand.

"Good-evening," I replied, addressing myself to Marguerite and Prudence.

"Will you sit down?"

"I am afraid of taking some one's place. Is the Count de G—— not coming back?"

"Yes; I have sent him to get me some 'bonbons,' so that we might converse for a few minutes. Madame Duvernoy is in my confidence."

"Yes, my children," said the latter; "make yourselves easy. I won't say anything."

"What is the matter with you this evening?" asked Marguerite, rising and going to the back of the box to kiss me on the forehead.

"I am not very well."

"Then go to bed," she replied, with that ironical air so well suited to her delicate and intelligent countenance.

"Where shall I go to bed?"

"In your rooms."

"You know very well that I cannot sleep there."

"Then you should not come and look so sulky because you have seen a gentleman in my box."

"That is not the reason why I look sulky."

"But it is, though. I am no novice, and you are wrong; so we will not say anything more about it. Come after the piece is over to Prudence's rooms, and remain there until I call you. Do you hear?"

"Yes."

Could I do anything else than obey her?

"You love me still?" she resumed.

"Can you ask such a thing!"

"Have you been thinking of me?"

"The whole day."

"Do you know I am decidedly afraid of falling in love with you? Ask Prudence."

"Yes," answered her buxom companion; "she worries me with talking so much about it."

"Now, then, go back to your seat. The Count will soon return, and need not find you here."

"Why?"

"Because it cannot be pleasant for you to see him."

"No; only if you had told me that you wished to go to the 'Vaudeville' this evening I could have sent you a box quite as well."

"Unfortunately he brought it me without my asking for it, and he offered also to accompany me. You know very well that I could not refuse him. All that I could do was to write to you where I was going, so that you might see me, and that I myself might have some pleasure in see-

ing you earlier; but as this is the reward I get for it I shall know what to do next time."

"I am wrong; I beg your pardon."

"Now that is better. Return quietly to your seat, and, above all, don't be jealous any more."

She kissed me again, and I left the box.

In the passage I met the Count, who was coming back.

I returned to my stall.

After all, the presence of Monsieur de G—— in Marguerite's box was the simplest thing in the world. He had been her lover; and there was nothing extraordinary in his bringing her a box and accompanying her to the theatre. From the moment such a girl as Marguerite became my mistress I was of course obliged to accept her ordinary mode of living.

Nevertheless, I was very unhappy for the remainder of the evening, and felt very sad on going away, after having seen the Count, Prudence, and Marguerite step into the carriage which was waiting for them at the door of the theatre.

And yet a quarter of an hour afterwards I was in Prudence's rooms. She had only just that moment returned.

CHAPTER XIII.

"You have come here almost as quickly as we did," said Prudence to me.

"Yes," I replied; "where is Marguerite?"

"In her rooms."

"Quite alone?"

"No, with Monsieur de G——"

I paced rapidly up and down the room.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Do you think it is pleasant for me to wait here till Monsieur de G—— leaves Marguerite?"

"You are talking nonsense! You know that she cannot turn the Count out of doors. He has long been her friend, has always given her a great deal of money, and still does so. Marguerite spends more than a hundred thousand francs a year, and has a good many debts. The Duke sends her whatever she asks for, but she cannot always be asking him for all she wants. She must not quarrel with the Count, who yearly allows her at least about ten thousand francs. Marguerite is very fond of you, my dear fellow, but you ought not to take your "liaison" with her so much to heart, for her sake as well as for yours. It is not with your seven or eight thousand francs that you can keep up the style in which she lives. Such a sum would not pay for her carriage. Take Marguerite for what she is; for a kind-hearted, intelligent and pretty girl; be her lover for a month or two; give her bouquets, 'bonbons,' and boxes at the theatre, but do not think of doing anything more, and

be not so ridiculous as to be jealous. You know what Marguerite is, and that she is not an innocent girl; and as you please her and are very fond of her, you should not worry about anything else. I like the idea of your being so thin-skinned! You have the most fascinating mistress in Paris; she receives you in magnificent rooms; she is covered with diamonds, and if you like will not cost you a penny, and yet you are not satisfied. What the deuce! you are too exacting."

"No doubt you are right; but in spite of myself, the idea that this man is her lover deeply hurts my feelings."

"But is he still her lover? She cannot do without his assistance; that is all.

"For the last two days she has closed her doors against him, but she cannot do otherwise than accept his box at the theatre, and allow him to accompany her. He returns with her and goes to her rooms for a moment, but he will not remain there, as you are here. All this is very natural, it seems to me. Besides, you do not object to the duke."

"That is true; but he is an old man, and I am sure that Marguerite is not his mistress. Moreover, one might possibly tolerate one 'liaison' and not accept two. Such leniency looks too much like calculation; and such easy-going lovers seem like those wretches who, fallen much lower, speculate on such a forbearance, and make a profit out of the speculation."

"My dear fellow, you are very much behind the times. How many men of noble birth, rich and most fashionable, have I seen, who behave as I advise you; and that without hesitation, or any feeling of shame or remorse. Why, it happens every day! How do you suppose certain ladies in Paris could keep up the style in which they live if they had not three or four lovers? There is no fortune, however large, which alone could defray the expenses of a girl

like Marguerite. A yearly income of five hundred thousand francs is enormous in France. Well, my dear friend, such an income would not be sufficient; and I will tell you why. A man who has so much money has an establishment to keep up; he has horses, servants, carriages, a pack of hounds, and friends; he often is married, has a family, keeps a racing stud, gambles, travels, and does ever so many things. All his actions are so regulated that he cannot dispense with any without raising a suspicion of being embarrassed, and being talked about. When all these items are taken into account, he cannot give to a woman more than forty or fifty thousand francs a year, and even that is a great deal. Very well, then; other amours must pay her yearly expenses. Marguerite has no need of this; she has, by a miracle, met an old millionaire whose wife and daughter are dead, whose only relatives are as wealthy as he is himself; and he gives her all that she asks, and wants nothing in exchange; but she cannot ask him for more than sixty or seventy thousand francs a year, and I am sure that if she were to apply to him for more he would refuse it, in spite of his fortune and the affection he entertains for her.

"All those young men with incomes of twenty or thirty thousand francs, that is to say, barely enough to live upon in the society they frequent, know very well, when they are the lovers of a girl like Marguerite, that she cannot even pay the rent of her apartments with what they give her. They do not tell her that they know this; they pretend not to see anything; and when this has lasted for some time they go about their business. If they are vain enough to try and pay for all she wants they ruin themselves like fools, and go to Algeria and are killed, after having left in Paris about a hundred thousand francs' worth of debts Do you suppose that such a girl is under any obligation to these men for acting thus? Not the

least in the world! On the contrary, she sees that she has sacrificed her position to them, and was losing money all the time she was with them! No doubt, you will consider all these details very disgraceful; but, nevertheless, they are true. You are a charming young fellow, whom I like very much; but I have lived for about twenty years among demi-reps; I know what they are, and their good and bad qualities, and I should not wish you to take seriously to heart a caprice which a pretty girl has for you.

"Moreover," continued Prudence, "let us admit that Marguerite loves you sufficiently to give up the Count and the Duke, in case the latter should become aware of her 'liaison,' and tell her to choose between you and him; then the sacrifice she would make for you would be enormous; there is no doubt of that! What sacrifice can you make for her that would be as important, when you have become tired of her, when, in fact, you want to have nothing more to do with her? What will you do, then, to repay her for what you have made her lose? Nothing! You will have isolated her from those friends amongst whom she might have made her fortune and a position for the future; she will have given you the best years of her life, and she will be forgotten. Either you will behave as men usually do, reproach her with her former life, tell her that in leaving her you only do what her other lovers have done, and abandon her to inevitable misery; or you will be an honest man, think it your duty to live with her, and thus unavoidably prepare for yourself a most wretched existence; for such a 'liaison,' excusable in a young man, ceases to be so when a man is of a certain age. She will have become an obstacle to everything; she prevents you from forming family ties or from listening to the voice of ambition, that second and last love of men. Believe me, then, my friend, take things as they are, and women for

what they are worth, and don't give to a girl like Marguerite the right of saying that you owe her anything."

These arguments were sensible, and so logical, that I should have thought Prudence quite incapable of them. I could find nothing to reply, except that she was quite right; then I shook hands with her, and thanked her for her advice.

"Come, come," she said, "drive away those ridiculous notions, and be merry. Life is delightful, my dear fellow, but that depends on the glass through which you look at it. Ask your friend Gaston for advice; he is a young fellow who seems to understand love as I do. You may be certain of one thing, unless you are an arrant fool, namely, that quite near here a handsome girl is waiting most impatiently for the departure of the person now with her; that she thinks a good deal of you, that you will stay with her till the morning, and that she certainly loves you. Now, come and stand at the window with me, so that we may see the Count go away, which he will do shortly, to make room for us."

Prudence opened her window, and we stood beside each other on the balcony.

She was looking at a few passers-by; I was buried in thought.

All that she had said to me was passing through my mind, and I could not help admitting that she was right; but the genuine love I felt for Marguerite could hardly reconcile itself to such arguments. I occasionally sighed, and then Prudence turned round and shrugged her shoulders like a physician who despairs of a patient.

"How short is life and how rapid are our sensations!" I said to myself. "I have scarcely known Marguerite two days. Only yesterday she became my mistress, and already she has taken such hold of my thoughts, my heart, and my

life, that the visit of the Count de G—— seems a misfortune happening to myself."

At length the Count went out, entered his carriage and drove off.

At the same moment Marguerite called us.

"Make haste, the cloth is being laid," she said, "we are going to have some supper."

When I entered the room she ran to meet me, threw her arms around my neck, and embraced me warmly.

"Are you still sulky?" she asked.

"No, it is all over," replied Prudence; "I have been preaching to him, and he has promised to be a good boy."

"That's right."

In spite of myself I cast my eyes on the bed; it had not been disturbed. As for Marguerite, she wore a white dressing-gown.

We sat down to supper.

Fascination, gentleness, frankness of manner, Marguerite possessed them all; and I was compelled, from time to time, to recognize that I had no right to demand anything else; that many persons would consider themselves happy to be in my place; and that, like the Shepherd of Virgil, I had only to enjoy the pleasures which a god, or rather a goddess, offered to me. I endeavored, therefore, to put into practice the theories of Prudence, and to be as cheerful as the two ladies were; but it was natural to them, and to me it was an effort. I felt so nervous that now and then I burst into laughter, and they were deceived, but I was almost shedding tears.

Supper was over at last, and I remained alone with Marguerite.

She sat down, as she was accustomed to do, upon the hearthrug, and gazed sadly into the fire.

She was thinking; I do not know of what. I gazed upon

her with a heart full of love, and was almost terrified whilst reflecting on what I was ready to suffer for her.

"Do you know what I have been thinking about?"

"No."

"Of a plan that I have formed."

"And what is that plan?"

"I cannot tell it you yet; but I can let you know what will be its result. Its result will be to set me free in a month from this time; then I shall no longer owe anything, and we will go and spend together the summer in the country."

"And you cannot tell me by what means you expect to succeed?"

"No, the only thing you have to do is to love me as I love you, and all will go well."

"Have you thought of this plan by yourself?"

"Yes."

"And you intend to carry it out by yourself?"

"I, alone, will have all the trouble," said Marguerite, with a smile I shall never forget; "but we will share the profits."

I blushed involuntarily at the word "profits," for it reminded me of Manon Lescaut spending with Des Grieux the money of Monsieur de B——.

I replied rather sternly, rising at the same time.

"You will permit me, my dear Marguerite, to refuse to share in the profits of any enterprise which I have not planned and executed myself."

"What is the meaning of this?"

"It means that I strongly suspect that the Count de G—— will become your partner in this ominous undertaking, and I will accept neither its responsibility nor its profits."

"You are very childish. I thought that you loved me, but I am deceived. It serves me right."

Whilst saying these words, she rose, opened the piano and began to play "The Invitation to the Waltz" up to the famous passage in the major key, which she never could master.

Was it from mere habit, or to remind me of the day when we became first acquainted? I cannot say; but I know that when I heard this melody my thoughts reverted to that time, and approaching her, I took hold of her head and embraced her.

"You forgive me?" I said.

"You see that I do," she replied; "but pray observe that this is only our second day's acquaintance, and that I already have something to forgive you. You do not keep very well your promise of blind obedience."

"I cannot help it, Marguerite; I love you too much, and I am jealous of your slightest thoughts. What you proposed to me just now drove me wild with joy; but I felt a pang at my heart when I thought how mysteriously you intend to carry out your project."

"Let us reason together," said she, taking both my hands, and looking at me with that charming smile which it was impossible to resist; "you love me, do you not? and you would be happy to pass three or four months with me alone in the country? I also should be happy to be alone with you, and not only should I feel happy, but I need it for the sake of my health. I cannot leave Paris for so long a time without putting my affairs in order, and the affairs of a person like myself are always in an awful mess. Well! I have discovered the means of arranging everything: my own affairs as well as my love for you. Yes, for you! you need not laugh. I am foolish enough to love you, and yet you assume grand airs and use big words to me. You are

childish, and worse than childish! only recollect that I love you, and do not worry yourself about anything else. Will that suit you? Tell me!"

"You know that whatever you wish will suit me."

"Then before a month is over we shall be in some village, wandering by the water-side and drinking milk. How odd that I should speak thus, I, Marguerite Gautier; but it is because this Paris life which seems to make me so happy wearies me, when it does not consume me; moreover, I feel sudden aspirations towards a calmer existence, which may recall my childhood. Every one has had a childhood, whatever one may have become afterwards. But do not make yourself uneasy. I am not going to tell you that I am a retired colonel's daughter and that I was educated at Saint-Denis. I am a poor country-girl, and could not write my name six years ago. Now you are a little more collected, are you not? Why do I first address myself to you to share that happiness I so anxiously desire? Doubtless because I recognize that you love me for myself, and not selfishly, while others have never loved me except for their own sake.

"I have often been in the country, but never as I should like to go. I count upon you for enjoying a happiness which is not difficult to procure. Therefore do not be ill-natured, but grant me what I ask. Say to yourself, 'she will not live very long, and one day or other I may regret not having granted the first request she ever made, and one, too, that was so easy to grant.'"

What could I reply to language like this; especially with the remembrance of a first night of love, and in the expectation of a second?

An hour later Marguerite was in my arms, and had she asked me to commit a crime I should have obeyed her.

At six o'clock in the morning I left, and before going I said to her:

"Till this evening."

She clasped me in her arms, but did not reply.

During the day I received a letter, which was as follows:

"My dear child, I am not very well, and the doctor orders me to take some rest. I will go to bed early this evening, and shall not expect you; but to recompense you, I hope to see you to-morrow morning at twelve. With best love."

My first thoughts were, "She is deceiving me."

A cold perspiration covered my brow, for I already loved this woman too deeply not to be upset by such a suspicion.

And, nevertheless, I might have expected almost daily such an occurrence; and the same thing had often happened to me with other women without my thinking much about it. Whence, then, the mastery Marguerite exercised over my feelings?

Then it occurred to me to pay her a visit as usual, as I had the key of her room, and thus quickly to learn the truth. I had made up my mind that if there was a man at Marguerite's I would box his ears.

In the meanwhile I went to the Champs Elysées and remained there four hours; but she did not make her appearance.

In the evening I visited all the theatres to which she was in the habit of going, but she was nowhere to be seen.

At eleven o'clock I went to the Rue d'Antin.

There was no light in Marguerite's windows, but, nevertheless, I rang the bell.

The "portier" asked me where I was going.

"To Mademoiselle Gautier," I replied.

"She has not yet come in."

"I will go up and wait for her."

"There is no one at home."

This man evidently obeyed an order that was given him, and I could certainly have done without his permission, as I had the key, but I feared to make myself ridiculous, and went away.

However, I did not go home, for I could not leave the street and lose sight of Marguerite's rooms. It seemed to me that I had still something to learn, or at least that my suspicions were about to be confirmed.

Towards midnight a brougham I knew well stopped at No. 9.

The Count de G—— got out of it and went into the house, after having dismissed his carriage.

For a moment I hoped that, like myself, he would be told that Marguerite was not at home and that I should see him come out again, but at four o'clock in the morning I was still waiting.

I have suffered a great deal during the last three weeks, but nothing in comparison, I believe, with what I suffered during that night.

CHAPTER XIV.

When I reached home I began to cry like a child. There does not exist a man who has not been deceived at least once in his life and does not know what one suffers on such an occasion.

Feverishly agitated, I resolved to break off at once this connection; for a man always believes to have enough strength of will to keep such a resolution. Therefore, I impatiently awaited the break of day, for then I would go and engage my seat in the stage coach and return to my father and sister, of whose affection I felt certain and on whom I could rely.

However, I did not like to leave without Marguerite knowing why I left. Only a man who really no longer loves his mistress leaves her without writing to her.

I planned a score of letters.

She was, after all, a girl like other demireps, and I had idealized her a great deal too much; she had treated me as a schoolboy, and it was clear that in order to deceive me she had played me a trick which was insulting in its very simplicity. My vanity was hurt, and I intended to leave this woman without giving her the satisfaction of knowing what pangs this rupture caused me. Here is what I wrote her in my neatest handwriting, whilst tears of rage and grief came into my eyes.

"My dear Marguerite—I trust that your indisposition of yesterday may not have been of much importance. Last night at eleven o'clock I called to ask how you were, and

they told me that you had not yet returned. Monsieur de G—— was more fortunate than I had been, for he presented himself a few minutes after me and was still in your rooms at four o'clock in the morning.

"Pardon me the few tedious hours I have inflicted on you, and be assured that I shall never forget the happy moments I owe you.

"I would have called to-day, but am about to return to my father's.

"Adieu, my dear Marguerite; I am neither rich enough to love you as I should like to, nor poor enough to love you as you would like. Forget, then, a man who must be almost indifferent to you, and I will forget a happiness which is no longer possible for me.

"I return you your key, which I never used, and which may be of some service to you, if you are often as ill as you were yesterday."

You see I could not finish this letter without being impertinent and sarcastic, and this showed that I was still in love.

I read over this letter about ten times, and the thought that it would cause some pain to Marguerite soothed me a little. I endeavored to impregnate myself with the feelings expressed in it; and at eight o'clock, when my servant came into the room, I gave it to him and told him to deliver it immediately.

"Must I wait for an answer?" asked Joseph, for, of course, my servant's name was Joseph, as all male servants bear that name.

"If any one asks you if you have to wait for an answer, say that you do not know, but wait."

I clung to the hope that she would answer me.

What poor and weak creatures we men are!

Whilst my servant was away, I felt very excited. Now, recalling how Marguerite had given herself up to me, I asked myself by what right I wrote her an impertinent letter, as she could answer me that it was not Monsieur de G—— who deceived me, but I who had deceived Monsieur de G——; an argument which allows many women to have several lovers. Again, recalling the protestations of this girl, I wished to convince myself that my letter was still too moderate, and contained no expressions strong enough to stigmatize a woman who laughed at an affection as sincere as mine. I also said to myself that it would have been better if I had not written, but had gone to see her during the day; for then I should have enjoyed the tears which I would have caused her to shed.

At last, I asked myself what answer she was going to send me, and was already prepared to accept any excuse she might make.

Joseph returned.

"Well?" I said to him.

"Sir," he replied, "the lady was still in bed and asleep, but as soon as she awakes they will give her your letter; and if there is an answer they will send it."

She was sleeping!

Twenty times I was on the point of sending my servant to fetch the letter back, but I always said to myself:

"Perhaps they have already given it to her, and it would look as if I were sorry for having sent it."

The shorter the time became when I could have expected her answer, the more I regretted having sent my letter.

Ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock had struck.

At twelve I thought of going to call upon her as if nothing had happened. In short I did not know what to imagine in order to free myself from the iron band I felt tightening around me.

Then, I thought with that superstition of people who are waiting for something, that if I were to go out for a short time I might find an answer on my return. Answers impatiently expected always arrive when one is not at home.

I went out under the pretext of going to breakfast.

Instead of breakfasting at the Café Foy at the corner of the Boulevard, as I usually did, I preferred to pass through the Rue d'Antin, and to breakfast in the "Palais Royal." Whenever I saw a woman in the distance I thought it was Nanine bringing me an answer; but I went through the whole of that street and did not even meet a commissionaire. In the "Palais Royal" I went to breakfast at Véry's, and the waiter made me eat, or rather served me with whatever he chose, for I did not eat anything.

In spite of myself I kept looking at the clock to see what time it was.

I returned home convinced that I was about to find an answer from Marguerite.

The "portier" had received nothing. I still hoped my servant might have got a note, but the latter had not seen a soul since I went out.

If Marguerite had intended to answer, she would have done so long ago.

Then I began to regret the terms of my letter. I should have remained perfectly silent; this would doubtless have made her uneasy and induce her to take some steps to find out why I had not come to see her at the appointed time; she would have asked for the reasons of my absence, and then only ought I to have given them to her. Had I acted thus, she could not have done anything else than exculpate herself, and what I wanted was that she should do so. I already felt that whatever reasons she might have given me I should have believed them, and that

I would have preferred anything to my not seeing her any more.

I persuaded myself that she would come to my rooms; but the time did not stand still, and yet she came not.

Decidedly Marguerite was not like other women, for very few would have received such a letter as I had just written and not have sent back some answer or other.

At five o'clock I hastened to the Champs Elysées.

If I meet her, I thought, I will assume an air of indifference and she will be convinced I already no longer think of her.

At the corner of the Rue Royale I saw her pass in her carriage. The meeting was so sudden that I turned pale. I do not know if she perceived my emotion; but as for me, I was so disturbed that I saw nothing else but her carriage.

I did not walk any longer in the Champs Elysées. I looked at the play-bills, for there might still be a chance of seeing her.

A new play was going to be brought out that night at the "Palais Royal," and Marguerite was sure to be present.

I went to the theatre at seven o'clock.

All the boxes became filled, but Marguerite did not appear.

Then I left the "Palais Royal" and visited the theatres she usually frequented, the "Vaudeville," the "Variétés," and the "Opéra Comique."

She was nowhere to be seen.

Either my letter had caused her too much pain to allow her to care about the theatre, or she dreaded to meet me and wished to avoid an explanation.

That is what my vanity whispered to me, until I met Gaston on the Boulevard, who asked me where I had been.

"I was at the 'Palais Royal.'"

"And I at the 'Opéra,'" he said. "I even thought I should see you there."

"Why?"

"Because Marguerite was there."

"Oh! was she there?"

"Yes."

"Alone?"

"No, with one of her female friends."

"With nobody else?"

"The Count de G—— came for a moment into her box, but she went away with the Duke. I expected to see you every minute. There was a stall next to me which remained empty the whole evening, and I was sure that you had taken it."

"But why should I go wherever Marguerite goes?"

"Because you are her lover."

"Who told you so?"

"Prudence, whom I met yesterday. I congratulate you, my dear fellow; she is a very pretty mistress, and rather select in her choice. Don't get rid of her; she will be a credit to you."

This simple reflection of Gaston showed me how ridiculous had been my susceptibility.

If I had met him the day before, and if he had spoken to me then, I certainly should not have written the silly letter I sent off in the morning.

I was hesitating for a moment whether to call on Prudence and ask her to let Marguerite know that I wished to speak to her; but I feared that out of spite she would refuse to receive me, and I went home after having passed through the Rue d'Antin.

I again asked my "portier" if there was a letter for me. He had received nothing.

Most likely she will wait to see if I am going to take

any further steps and repudiate the letter I sent to-day," I said to myself on going to bed; "but she will perceive that I have not written to her and write to me to-morrow."

That night especially, I repented of what I had done. I was alone in my room and not able to sleep, tortured by an uneasy mind and by jealousy; whilst, if I had only let things follow their course, I might have been with Marguerite, listening to the charming words I had heard but twice, and which still burned in my ears whilst alone.

The worst of my position was, that on arguing with myself, I felt I was wholly wrong. In fact everything convinced me that Marguerite loved me. To begin with, this plan of passing the summer with me in the country; then, the certainty that nothing compelled her to become my mistress, as my income was too small for her necessities, and even for her caprices. She expected, therefore, nothing from me but a sincere affection, in which she could seek repose from the mercenary amours amongst which she lived. Though I had only known her a couple of days I had annihilated her expectation, and repaid with bitter irony the love I had accepted for two nights. My behavior was, therefore, more than ridiculous; it was indelicate. I had not even paid her, and I claimed the right of censuring her way of living! Leaving her on the second day of our acquaintance made me look like a parasite of love afraid of having to pay for his meal. What! I had known Marguerite for thirty-six hours, I had been her lover for twenty-four, and I took offense! Instead of being too happy that she devoted to me part of her time, I wished to have her all to myself, and compel her to break off abruptly those connections which she had made during her past career, and which were a guarantee to her for the future. What reproaches had I a right to make because she wrote to me that she was indisposed, when she might have told

me plainly, with the hideous frankness of certain women, that she had to receive her lover? Why, instead of believing what she stated in her letter, instead of taking a walk through the streets of Paris and of avoiding the Rue d'Antin; instead of passing the evening with some of my friends, and presenting myself the next day at the time appointed, did I act like Othello, play the spy, and did I think to punish her by seeing her no more? On the contrary, she must have been delighted with this separation, and have considered me extremely silly. And if she did not answer me, it was not because she bore malice, but because she despised me.

I ought to have made a present to Marguerite which would not have left her in doubt as to my generosity, and would have allowed me, whilst treating her as a demirep, to consider myself no longer in her debt; but I was afraid of offending by the slightest remuneration, not the love she had for me, but the love I felt for her; and as this love was so pure that it admitted no partners, I could not repay by a present, no matter how costly, the happiness she had given me, however short-lived that happiness may have been.

All these arguments I repeated to myself during the night, and I was ready at any moment to go and tell them to Marguerite.

When day dawned, I had not yet closed my eyes; I was very feverish, and it was impossible for me to think of anything else but of Marguerite.

You can well understand that it was necessary for me to take some decisive step, and either to break forever with this woman, or with my scruples, if she would still consent to receive me.

But you know one always delays taking a decided step; therefore, not being able to stay at home, and not daring

to present myself at Marguerite's, I tried some means of seeing her, which my vanity might attribute to chance, in case I should succeed.

At nine o'clock I hastened to go to Prudence, who asked me why I visited her so early.

I did not dare to tell her frankly the reason of my coming to her; but replied that I had gone out early to engage a seat in the coach starting for C——, where my father lived.

"You are very fortunate in being able to leave Paris whilst we have such fine weather."

I stared at Prudence, and asked myself if she was making fun of me.

But she looked very serious.

"Are you going to say good-bye to Marguerite?" she said, still in a serious tone.

"No!"

"You are quite right."

"Do you think so?"

"Of course I do. As you have quarreled with her what is the good of seeing her again?"

"You know, then, that we have quarrelled?"

"She showed me your letter."

"And what did she say to you?"

"She remarked:—'My dear Prudence, your protégé is not polite. A man may imagine such letters, but he does not write them.'"

"Was she very emphatic when she said this?"

"No, she was laughing; and she added, 'He has twice taken supper with me and has not even favored me with a call.'"

This was the effect my letter and my jealousy had produced. I felt deeply humiliated both in my vanity and my love.

"What did she do last evening?"

"She went to the 'Opéra.'"

"I know that; and what next?"

"She took supper at home."

"Alone?"

"With the Count de G——, I believe."

Thus my quarrel had produced no change in Marguerite's habits.

When such incidents happen, a certain class of people will tell you:

"You should think no more of this woman, for she did not love you."

"Well, I am very glad to hear Marguerite does not make herself miserable on my account," I said, trying to smile.

"You are quite right; you have done what you ought. You had more common sense than she had, for that girl was in love with you; she did nothing but talk about you, and would have been capable of committing any folly for your sake."

"Why has she not answered me, then, if she loves me?"

"Because she is now aware that it is wrong to love you. Moreover, women allow themselves, now and then, to be deceived in love, but never their self-love to be wounded; and a man always wounds the self-love of a woman when he leaves her two days after he has become her lover, whatever the cause of their rupture may be. I know Marguerite; she would die rather than answer you."

"What do you advise me to do?"

"Nothing. She will forget you, you will forget her; and both of you will have nothing to reproach yourselves with."

"But if I were to write to her to ask her pardon?"

"Do nothing of the kind; she would pardon you."

I was on the point of embracing Prudence.

A quarter of an hour afterwards I was in my rooms, and wrote to Marguerite:

"Some one who repents of a letter he wrote yesterday, and who will leave town to-morrow if you do not pardon him, wishes to know at what o'clock he can lay his repentance at your feet?

"When will he find you alone? for you are aware that confessions should be made without witnesses."

I folded up this sort of a madrigal in prose, and handed it to Joseph, who delivered the letter to Marguerite herself. She told him that she would answer it by and bye.

I went out for a few minutes to take some dinner, and at eleven o'clock at night I had not yet received an answer.

I then resolved not to suffer any longer, but to leave town next morning.

Having taken this resolution, and being convinced that even if I went to bed I should not be able to close my eyes, I began to pack up.

CHAPTER XV.

JOSEPH and I had been occupied for about an hour in packing, when some one violently rang the bell.

"Shall I open the door?" asked Joseph.

"Yes," said I, wondering who could call at such an hour, and not daring to hope that it was Marguerite.

"Sir," said Joseph, coming again into the room, "two ladies want to see you."

"We have come to see you, Armand," said a voice which I recognized as Prudence's.

I came out of my bedroom.

Prudence was in my sitting-room examining some curiosities, whilst Marguerite, seated on the couch, was buried in thought.

I ran up to her, knelt down at her feet, took both her hands in mine, and, in a voice trembling with emotion, asked her to forgive me.

She kissed me on the forehead and said:

"This is already the third time that I have pardoned you."

"I was about to leave town to-morrow."

"How can my paying you a visit change your intention? I did not come to prevent you from leaving Paris, but because I had no time during the day to answer your letter, and did not like to let you think that I was still angry with you. Prudence, however, did not wish me to come, for she said that I might perhaps disturb you."

"You disturb me, Marguerite? You! And how?"

"You might have a lady with you," replied Prudence, "and it would not have been very pleasant for her to see two others arrive."

Whilst Prudence made these remarks, Marguerite looked at me attentively.

"My dear Prudence," I replied, "you do not know what you are saying."

"Your rooms look very nice," replied Prudence; "may I look at your bedroom?"

Prudence went into my bedroom, less to examine it than to make amends for the foolish remark she had just made, and to leave Marguerite alone with me.

"Why did you bring Prudence?" I asked her.

"Because she has been with me to the theatre; and also because I wished to have some one to accompany me on leaving this house."

"Could I not accompany you?"

"Yes, but I did not like to disturb you; moreover, I was quite certain that if you saw me home, you would ask me to allow you to come in; and, as I could not permit this, I preferred you should leave town without having the right of blaming me for refusing to admit you."

"And why could you not receive me?"

"Because I am closely watched, and the slightest suspicion might do me a serious injury."

"Is that your only reason?"

"I would tell you if there were any other; we know one another so well that there ought to be no longer any secrets between us."

"Come, Marguerite, I like to go straight to the point: tell me frankly, do you love me?"

"Very much."

"Then, why have you been false to me?"

"My dear friend, if I were some duchess, or if I had

a yearly income of two hundred thousand francs, and if then I were your mistress and had another lover, you might have a right to ask me such a question; but I am Marguerite Gautier; I owe forty thousand francs, I am not worth a penny, and I spend a hundred thousand francs a year. Your question is, therefore, unnecessary, and my answer would be useless."

"It is true," I said, letting my head drop on Marguerite's knees; "but I am madly in love with you."

"Then, my friend, you should love me a little less, or understand me a little better. You letter has pained me deeply; for, to begin with, if I had been free I should not have received the Count the day before yesterday; or, having received him, I would have come to ask you to forgive me, as you have asked me just now, and in future should have no other lover but you. I believed for a moment that I might have enjoyed such a happiness for six months; but you objected to it; you insisted upon knowing by what means I could realize my plan. Good Heavens! it was not very difficult to find out these means; and I would have made a greater sacrifice for you than you can imagine. I might have told you that I was in want of twenty thousand francs, and as you are in love with me, you would have found the money, and, later on reproached me with having asked you for it. I should have preferred to owe you nothing, but you did not understand this sentiment of delicacy, for it really was one. Girls such as we are, when we have still a little feeling left, give to words and things a meaning and an expression unknown to other women; therefore, I repeat to you that for Marguerite Gautier to have found the means of paying her debts without asking you for any money, was a delicacy of which you ought to have taken advantage without making any remarks. If our acquaintance had only begun to-day you would have

been but too happy to accept my proposals, and would not have asked me what I had done two days ago. We are sometimes forced to purchase a gratification of our feelings at the expense of our bodies, and we suffer far more when, after all, our promised gratification escapes us."

I listened to these words and gazed upon Marguerite with admiration, and when I reflected that this lovely creature whose feet I should have been delighted to kiss but a short time ago, was willing to think of me now and then, to let me share her life, and that I was not yet satisfied with what she granted me, I could not but ask myself if man's desires have any limits, for even when they are gratified as quickly as mine had been he still demands something more.

"It is true," she observed, "we creatures of chance, we are fantastic in our desires, and fall in love without knowing why. We give our love sometimes for one thing, and sometimes for another. There are men who ruin themselves for our sake and yet obtain no favor at our hands; while others win us with a bouquet. We have our caprices, which are our sole amusement, and our only excuse. I swear to you that I gave myself to you sooner than ever I did to any other man; and why? Because, when you saw me spit blood you took my hand and shed tears; because you are the only human being who condescended to pity me. I am going to tell you something very foolish: formerly I had a little dog that used to look at me quite sadly when I was coughing, and it is the only living being I ever loved.

"When it died, I wept more than ever I did at my mother's death, but then she had beaten me for about twelve years of her life! Well, I suddenly loved you as much as I had ever loved my dog. If men only knew what they might obtain by shedding a few tears, they would be

more beloved and we should be less inclined to ruin them.

"Your letter has shown you in your true character, and proved to me that your feelings were not as delicate as I thought; it has injured my love for you more than anything else you could have done. It is true it proved that you were jealous, but also that you were sarcastic and impertinent. I was already sad when your letter arrived; I expected to see you at noon and to lunch with you; to efface, in fact, a thought which haunted me but which had not troubled me before I knew you.

"Moreover," continued Marguerite, "you were the only person before whom I imagined intuitively that I could think and speak freely. All those people who are the companions of girls like me have an interest in discovering a meaning in every word that is said, and draw conclusions from the most insignificant actions. Naturally enough, we have no friends. We have lovers who are selfish and spend their fortune, not for our sakes, as they tell us, but to gratify their own vanity.

"For such persons we must be merry when they are; in good health when they wish to take supper; and be skeptical because they are so. We are forbidden to have feelings of our own unless we wish to be made fun of and to lose our influence.

"We do not belong to ourselves; we are no longer human beings, but things. We occupy the first place in our admirers' self-love, but the last in their esteem. We have friends, but they are friends like Prudence; women who formerly were demireps, but still retain a taste for spending money which they can no longer gain, on account of their age. Then they become our friends, or rather our pensioners. They often are servile, but never unselfish. They will never advise you unless it brings them in some-

thing. Little do they care if we have ten lovers, provided they can get dresses or a bracelet, occasionally can take a drive in our carriage and have a seat in our box at the theatre. They use our bouquets of the day before, and borrow our cashmere shawls. They never render us any service, however trifling, without making us pay double or treble what it is worth. You yourself saw that the very evening Prudence brought me six thousand francs, for which I sent her to the Duke's, she borrowed five hundred which she never will repay, or for which she will give me bonnets I shall never wear.

"We, or rather I, can therefore only have one happiness, for I am sometimes sad and feel always ill, namely, to find a man sufficiently high-minded not to demand an account of my past life and to be the lover of my imagination rather than of my person. The Duke is such a man, but he is old, and age neither protects nor consoles. I fancied I could have led the life he wished me to lead; but I was dying of ennui, and if one has to die, it is just as well to throw oneself into a fire as to be suffocated by charcoal-fumes.

"Then I met you, young, ardent and happy; and I thought I had found in you the man I longed to meet in my solitude, where I am never at rest. What I loved in you was not the man you are, but the one you were going to be. You do not consent to play this part; you reject it as unworthy of you; you are a commonplace lover. Do as others have done; pay me and let us say no more about it."

Marguerite, fatigued by this lengthy confession, threw herself back on the sofa, and, to check a slight attack of coughing, pressed her handkerchief to her lips, and even to her eyes.

"Forgive me, forgive me," I murmured; "I already

understood all this, but I wished to hear you say it, my adored Marguerite! Let us forget the rest and only remember one thing: that we belong to each other, that we are young, and that we love each other.

"Do with me whatever you please, Marguerite; I am your slave, your dog, but for Heaven's sake tear up the letter I wrote to you and don't let me go away to-morrow, for I should die."

Marguerite took my letter from her bosom, and handing it to me, said, with a gentle and sweet smile:

"Here it is; I brought it back to you."

I tore up the letter, and whilst shedding tears kissed the hand which had given it back to me.

That very moment Prudence returned to the sitting-room.

"I say, Prudence, do you know what he asks?" said Marguerite.

"He asks you to forgive him."

"That's it."

"And you forgive him."

"I cannot help it; but he wants something more."

"What is it?"

"He wants to come and take supper with us."

"And you consent?"

"What do you say?"

"I say that you are a couple of children, and that neither of you has any common sense. But I also say that I am very hungry, and the sooner you consent the sooner we shall get something to eat."

"Let us go," said Marguerite; "my carriage will hold three. By-the-by," she added, turning towards me, "Nanine will be in bed, so you must open the door. Take my key and try not to lose it again."

I smothered Marguerite with kisses.

Joseph entered at this moment.

"Sir," said he, with the air of a man who is quite satisfied with himself, "your trunks are packed."

"Every one of them?"

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Then go and unpack them again. I am not leaving town."

CHAPTER XVI.

I MIGHT have told you the history of this "liaison" in a few words, continued Armand, but I wanted to show to you how I accidentally and gradually consented to do whatever Marguerite desired, whilst she was unable to live any longer without me.

The very next day after her visit to me I sent her "Manon Lescaut."

From that moment, as I could not change Marguerite's way of living, I changed my own. Above all, I was anxious not to allow myself any time to reflect upon the character I had accepted; for, in spite of myself, I would have felt deeply grieved. Thus my life, usually so calm, suddenly assumed an appearance of unrest and disorder. Do not imagine that, however unselfish the love of such a woman may be, it costs nothing. Nothing is so expensive as to pay for ever so many caprices, flowers, boxes at various theatres, suppers, and visits to the country; and these things a man can never refuse to his mistress.

I told you already that I am not a rich man. My father, who was then, and is still, Receiver-General at G——, has a high reputation for integrity and through it was enabled to raise the necessary guarantee-money before entering upon his duties. This post brings him in forty thousand francs a year; he has occupied it these ten years, has repaid the money advanced, and has laid by a dowry for my sister. My father is the most honorable man in the world. My mother at her death left an income of six thousand francs,

which he divided between my sister and me on the very day he obtained his appointment. In addition to this, he said when I became of age that he would allow me another five thousand francs, assuring me that with eight thousand francs a year I might live very well in Paris, and create for myself a position either at the bar or in medicine. I came, therefore, to town, studied law, passed as a barrister, and like many other young men put my diploma in my pocket and abandoned myself more or less to the easy-going life of Paris. My expenses were very moderate; it only took me eight months to spend my year's income, whilst during the summer months I stayed at my father's house, which gave me practically an income of twelve thousand francs and the reputation of being a dutiful son. And what is more, I was not a penny in debt.

Such were my circumstances when I made Marguerite's acquaintance.

You can easily understand that my expenses increased in spite of myself. Marguerite was very capricious, and one of those women who never consider expensive the many little amusements of which their life is made up. Hence, whenever she wished to stay as long as possible with me, she would write in the morning that she intended to dine with me, not in her own rooms, but at some restaurant either in town or in the country. I would go and fetch her; then we would dine together, go to the theatre, and very often afterwards take some supper, so that before the day was over I had spent four or five louis, which is from two thousand five hundred to three thousand francs a month; and thus my yearly income only was sufficient for about three months and a half. This left me no choice but to run into debt or to leave Marguerite.

I would have done anything rather than adopt this latter alternative.

Forgive me for troubling you with all these details, but you will see that they were the primary causes of events which happened later. I am telling you a story that has really happened, in all its simplicity, without any additions of my own, and quite natural in its development.

I therefore felt that, as nothing on earth could make me abandon my mistress, I would be obliged to find some means of providing the money I had to spend. Moreover, this passion absorbed me so completely that the moments I passed away from Marguerite seemed years to me; and I felt the necessity of ridding myself of those moments by nourishing some other passion, and by living so fast that I should not perceive the flight of time.

I commenced by borrowing five or six thousand francs upon the security of my small capital, and I began to play; for since public gambling houses have been closed people gamble everywhere. Formerly, when a man entered Frascati, there was a chance of his making a fortune; he played against ready cash, and if he lost he had at least the consolation of knowing that he might have won; whilst now, except in clubs, where certain strict rules still are enforced about the payment of debts of honor, a man is almost certain, if he wins a sum of any importance, never to receive it. The reason is easy to understand.

Play is only resorted to by young men whose income is not sufficient for their wants, and who lack the fortune requisite to maintain the sort of life they are leading. They play, therefore, and the natural result is either that they win, and then the losers furnish them with money for their horses and mistresses which is far from agreeable; or they begin to run into debt. Friendships commenced around the green-cloth end in quarrels, in which reputation and life are always more or less damaged; and many an honest man often is ruined by very worthy young fel-

lows, with no other faults except not possessing incomes of two hundred thousand francs.

I need not speak of the men who cheat at play, and of whom we hear some day or other that they have been obliged to leave the country, or have been caught in the act and brought before the magistrate.

I plunged therefore into this fast, tumultuous and volcanic mode of living, of which formerly the mere thought would have frightened me, but which was the inevitable consequence of my love for Marguerite. What else could I do?

If I did not pass the night in the Rue d'Antin I never stayed in my rooms, for I could not have slept. Jealousy would have kept me awake, and have excited thoughts and feelings that almost drove me distracted; whilst play for a moment diverted the feverish passion which was consuming me and made me take in it an interest which fascinated me in spite of myself, until the hour when I was about to visit my mistress. When that moment arrived, and by this I perceived how much I loved her, I left the gambling table without any hesitation, whether I was winning or losing, whilst pitying those who remained there, and who could not, like me, find happiness in leaving it.

For some persons play is a passion; for me it was a remedy.

If I could have been cured of Marguerite I should have been cured of gambling.

Thus in the midst of all this excitement, I kept pretty cool; I lost no more than I could pay, and won no more than could afford to lose.

Moreover, chance favored me; I did not get into debt, and yet I spent three times as much money as before I began to play. It was not easy to withdraw from a life which, without inconveniencing me, gave me the means

of satisfying the many caprices of Marguerite. As for her, she continued to love me as much as ever, and even more.

As I told you, I began by being received only at midnight and remained till six in the morning; then I was admitted occasionally to her box, and sometimes she would come and dine with me; one morning I did not leave her until eight o'clock, and one day I did not depart till noon.

Meanwhile, a moral as well as a physical change had taken place in Marguerite. I had undertaken to cure her, and the poor girl, who guessed what I wanted, obeyed me to prove her gratitude. I succeeded with some difficulty, and not too abruptly, in ridding her almost completely of her former habits. My doctor, whom I induced to visit her, told me that nothing but repose and quiet could preserve her health. Instead of suppers and nights passed without going to bed, I at last persuaded her to follow a healthy system of diet, and to keep regular hours. In spite of herself, Marguerite got accustomed to this new existence, which she felt did her a great deal of good. She began already to pass some evenings at home, or if the weather were fine she would wrap herself up in her shawl, cover her face with a veil, and like two children we would wander about at night-time in the shady walks of the Champs-Elysées. She came home, tired out, and after a light supper, would play a little music or read a short time, a thing which she had never done before, and then retire. The cough, which every time I heard it seemed to rend my own chest, had almost entirely disappeared.

At the end of six weeks there was no longer any discussion about the Count, for he was sacrificed to me. The Duke, alone, made it necessary for me to conceal my "liaison" with Marguerite; and even he had been often sent away whilst I was in her rooms, under the pretext

that she was lying down, and had forbidden any one to wake her.

As Marguerite had acquired the habit, and even felt the necessity of being in my company, I frequently left the gambling table at the precise moment an experienced gambler would have quitted it. On making up my accounts I found I had won ten thousand francs, which seemed to me an inexhaustible sum.

The time when I was in the habit of visiting my father and sister had arrived, and yet I did not go. I began to receive frequent letters from them begging me to come home.

To all these requests I replied as well as I could, and constantly wrote to them that I was in very good health and did not want any money: two things which I thought would console my father somewhat for the delay of my annual visit.

It happened one morning that Marguerite, being awakened by a brilliant sunshine, jumped out of bed, and asked me to take her that very day into the country.

We sent for Prudence, and we all three went off, but not before Marguerite had recommended Nanine to tell the Duke that she had taken advantage of such a lovely day, and had gone into the country with Madame Duvernoy.

It was necessary for Prudence to be present, to set the old Duke's mind at rest; she was, moreover, one of those persons who seem to be expressly created for such rural excursions. With her invariably good temper and her continual appetite, no one in her company could for a moment feel dull; she also understood perfectly how to order eggs, cherries, milk, stewed rabbit, and the various dishes which form the traditional breakfast in the environs of Paris.

It only remained for us to decide where we were going.

It was Prudence, again, who came to our aid.

"Do you want to see some real rustic scenery?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Very well, then; let us go to Bougival, to the 'Break o' Day,' kept by the widow Arnould. Armand, go and fetch a carriage."

An hour and a half later we were at the widow Arnould's.

You perhaps know this tavern, an hotel during the week, and a pleasure-garden on Sundays. There is a magnificent view from the garden, which is on the same height as a first floor usually is. On the left, the aqueduct of Marly bounds the horizon; on the right, a large number of hills are visible. The river, almost without current at this spot, rolls like a large white watered-silk ribbon between the plains of Gabillons and the Isle of Croissy, forever cradled amidst trembling poplars and whispering willows.

In the background, lit up by the rays of the sun, rise numerous little white houses with red roofs, and factories which, losing in the distance their inartistic and commercial character, charmingly complete the landscape.

Paris was a long way off, shrouded in a haze.

We found that Prudence had told us the truth; this was real rural scenery, and I must also confess that we ate a real breakfast.

It is not because I have been happy in this spot, but in spite of its name I maintain that Bougival is one of the prettiest places imaginable. I have travelled a great deal, and have seen many grand sights, but never one more charming than this little village airily nestling at the bottom of the hill that shelters it.

Madame Arnould asked us if we should like to take a boat and go for a row, and Marguerite and Prudence gladly accepted her offer.

Love and the country are always associated, and rightly so: nothing so appropriately sets off the woman we love as a blue sky, sweet odors, flowers, a gentle breeze, and the glorious solitude of the woods or fields. However sincerely a man may love a woman, however absolute may be his confidence in her, whatever certainty for the future he may derive from her past, he is always more or less jealous. If you have ever been seriously in love, you must have experienced this craving for isolating the being whom you desire to live solely for yourself. However indifferent she may be to her surroundings, the beloved object appears to lose something of her perfume and entity by merely being brought in contact with men and things. I felt this especially. My love was not an ordinary passion. I was as much in love as any human being could be, but it was with Marguerite Gautier; and in Paris I might jostle at every step some man who had been her lover or might become so the very next day; whilst in the country, among people we had never seen, and who did not trouble themselves about us, in the midst of nature decked out in vernal splendor, and away from the noisy town, I could hide my beloved from every one, and love without shame or apprehension.

The courtesan disappeared by degrees, and by my side was a young and beautiful girl, whom I loved, who loved me, and whose name was Marguerite. The past no longer existed for me, the future was no longer clouded. The sun shone upon my mistress as if she had been the chastest of brides. We wandered together amid those charming scenes, which appear to have been created on purpose to recall the poems of Lamartine or to re-echo the melodies of Scudo. Marguerite, dressed in white, was walking arm-in-arm with me, and repeated at night, beneath a starry sky, the words she had uttered on the pre-

vious day, whilst the distant world went its daily round, without darkening by its shadow the smiling picture of our youth and love.

Such was my dream on that day, amidst the burning rays of the sun shining through the leaves; whilst I, reclining at full length upon the turf of the little island where we had landed, allowed my thoughts, free from all human ties which ere this had restrained them, to wander at will and try to realize every expectation.

Add to this, that from the spot where I was reclining, I perceived by the river-side a charming cottage, two stories high, enclosed by a semi-circular railing, and through the railing a lawn smooth as velvet; and behind the house a little wood full of hidden nooks carpeted with a virgin moss, in which the footsteps of the evening would have disappeared by the following morning.

Creepers covered the porch of this house, where no one dwelt, and climbed up to the windows of the first floor.

I gazed so long at this cottage that finally I became convinced that it was mine, so exactly did it adapt itself to the dream in which I had been indulging. I seemed to see Marguerite and myself during the day in the wood which covered the slope, and at night seated upon the lawn; and I asked myself if human beings could ever be happier than we should have been.

"What a sweet cottage!" observed Marguerite, who followed the direction of my glance, and perhaps also of my thoughts.

"Where?" asked Prudence.

"Over yonder," and Marguerite pointed to the cottage I had been looking at.

"Oh, lovely!" exclaimed Prudence; "do you like it?"

"Very much."

"Well, tell the Duke to hire it for you; he will do so, I

am certain; I will undertake to bring it about, if you wish."

Marguerite looked at me as if to ask my opinion about this suggestion.

My dream vanished with the last words of Prudence, and precipitated me so rudely into reality that I was still stunned by the fall.

"That is indeed a capital idea," I stammered, without knowing what I said.

"Very well; I think I can manage it," said Marguerite, pressing my hand, and interpreting my words according to her own wishes. We will go at once and see if it is to be let."

The cottage was empty, and its rent was two thousand francs a year.

"Will you be happy here?" asked Marguerite.

"Am I quite certain of coming here?"

"For whom else should I bury myself in such a spot, if not for your sake?"

"Then let me take this house for you."

"Are you mad? It would not only be useless but dangerous. You know that only one man has a right to bestow such favors on me. Leave me to manage it, you booby, and hold your peace."

"Whenever I shall have a couple of days to call my own I will come and spend them with you," observed Prudence.

We left the house, and the carriage drove back to Paris while we were discussing the new plan. I held Marguerite in my arms, so that by the time we arrived at her rooms I had already begun to look upon the scheme in a much less scrupulous spirit than I had done at first.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE next day Marguerite dismissed me early, telling me that the Duke was coming soon, and promising to write me as soon as he should have left, to let me know, as usual, where to meet her in the evening:

During the day I received the following message:

"I am going to Bougival with the Duke. Be at Prudence's rooms this evening at eight o'clock."

Marguerite had returned by that time, and came to meet me at Madame Duvernoy's.

"Well, everything is arranged," she said, as she entered.

"Is the house taken?" asked Prudence.

"Yes; he did not hesitate for a moment."

I did not know the Duke, but I was ashamed of deceiving him as I was doing.

"Oh, that's not all," continued Marguerite.

"Is there anything else?"

"I have been thinking about lodgings for Armand."

"In the same house?" asked Prudence, laughing.

"No, but at the 'Break o' Day,' where the Duke and I breakfasted. Whilst he was looking at the view, I asked Madame Arnould—I think that is her name—if she had some nice rooms to let. Just now a sitting-room, an anteroom, and a bedroom were at liberty. I thought that was all you wanted, and as the price was sixty francs a month,

and as they are furnished in a style to make a man laugh who has a fit of the 'blues,' I took the rooms. Have I done right?"

I clasped Marguerite in my arms.

"It will be charming," she continued. "You will have a key of the little door, and I have promised the Duke a key of the gate, which he is sure to refuse, for he only pays visits in the daytime. I believe, between ourselves, that he is delighted with my idea of leaving Paris for some time, for this will silence his relatives. However, he asked me how I, who loved Paris so much, could make up my mind to go and bury myself in the country; and I replied that I was far from well and needed some rest. He seemed not quite to believe me, for the poor old man is always suspicious. Therefore, my dear Armand, we must take a good many precautions, for he will have me watched; and he must not only take this house for me but will also have to pay my debts, and unfortunately I have plenty of them. Does that suit you?"

"Yes," I replied, striving to stifle the scruples which the idea of this mode of life from time to time stirred within me.

"We went all over the house, and it will suit us very well. The Duke has looked into everything. Oh, my dear," added the madcap girl, embracing me, "you are a lucky fellow; you have a millionaire to arrange things for you."

"When are you going to move?" asked Prudence.

"As soon as possible."

"Are you going to take your carriage and horses with you?"

"I shall take all my servants with me, and you will have to look after my rooms whilst I am away."

Eight days afterwards Marguerite had taken possession

of her country house, whilst I had lodgings at the "Break o' Day."

Then commenced an existence which I find it very difficult to describe to you.

In the beginning of her stay at Bougival, Marguerite found it almost impossible altogether to break off her old habits; and, as she always kept open house, several of her female friends came to see her. For a whole month not a single day passed without Marguerite having eight or ten people to dine with her. Prudence, on her side, brought also all the people she knew, and did them the honors of the house just as if it were her own.

The Duke's money paid for all this, as you can well imagine; nevertheless, occasionally Prudence came and asked me to let her have a thousand francs, professedly in Marguerite's name. You know I had made some money at the gambling table, and, therefore, was anxious to give to Prudence whatever Marguerite wanted; and for fear that she might need more than I actually possessed, I went to Paris and borrowed the same amount as before, which I had punctually repaid.

I thus, again, became the possessor of about ten thousand francs, without counting my yearly allowance.

However, the pleasure which Marguerite felt in receiving her friends diminished somewhat when she came to consider the expenses and also because she occasionally was obliged to ask me for money. The Duke, who had taken this cottage so that Marguerite might be quiet, no longer made his appearance, for fear of meeting a merry party of her friends by whom he did not wish to be seen. His reason for not coming was that, one day when intending to dine with Marguerite, he stumbled on more than a dozen persons who had been breakfasting, and had not yet finished when he thought of dining. As he did not

know anything about this breakfast he opened the door of the dining-room, and was received with a loud burst of laughter, so that he was compelled to retire suddenly before the impertinent merriment of the female guests.

Marguerite rose from the table and went into the next room to see the Duke, to endeavor, as much as possible, to make him forget this incident; but the old man, wounded in his self-love, would not be appeased; he cruelly told the poor girl that he was tired of paying for the follies of a woman who allowed him to be insulted even in her own house, and he went away in high dudgeon.

From that day nothing more was heard of him. Marguerite sent away her guests and changed her habits; but, in spite of this, there came no tidings from the Duke. Through this incident my mistress belonged to me more than ever, and my dream became at length realized. Marguerite could no longer do without me. Without caring as to what might be the result, she no longer concealed our "liaison," and eventually I went to live with her. The servants called me "sir," and looked upon me as their master.

It is true that Prudence argued and preached about the life we were leading, but Marguerite replied that she loved me and could not live without me; and that, whatever might happen, she would not renounce the happiness of having me always with her; adding at the same time that all those who did not like it were at perfect liberty to stay away.

I overheard this one day when Prudence told Marguerite that she had something very important to communicate to her, and when I was listening at the door of the room in which they were closeted.

A little while after Prudence came again to Bougival. I was at the bottom of the garden when she entered

the house, and she did not see me. I fancied from Marguerite's reception of her that a conversation like the one I had already overheard was again about to take place; and I was anxious to listen to it, as I had done to the other.

The two women shut themselves up in the boudoir, and I put my ear to the door.

"Well?" asked Marguerite.

"Well! I have seen the Duke."

"What did he say?"

"That he was quite willing to pardon you what had taken place, but that he had heard you were living openly with Monsieur Armand Duval, and this he could not forgive. He said to me: 'Let Marguerite leave this young man, and I will give her, as I used to do, whatever she wants, but if not, it will be useless to apply to me for anything.'"

"And what answer did you make?"

"That I would let you know his decision; I also promised to try to induce you to listen to reason. My dear girl, think seriously of the position you lose, and which Armand can never give you back. He loves you most ardently, but his means are not large enough to supply your wants; and some day or other he will be obliged to leave you, when it will be too late, and when the Duke will do nothing more for you. Shall I speak to Armand?"

Marguerite seemed to reflect, for she did not answer. I was greatly agitated whilst awaiting her reply.

"No," she said, "I will not leave Armand; I shall not hide myself in order to live with him. It is perhaps, a folly, but I love him; I cannot help it. Moreover, he has become accustomed to love me without let or hindrance; he will suffer too much in being obliged to leave me, were it only for an hour a day. Besides, I

have not such a long time to live! Why, then, should I make myself unhappy and do whatever an old man wishes whose very sight ages me? Let him keep his money! I shall do without it."

"But what will you do?"

"I do not know."

Prudence was doubtless about to say something, but I entered suddenly, threw myself at Marguerite's feet and bedewed her hands with the tears which the joy of being thus loved made me shed.

"My life is yours, Marguerite; you no longer need that man, for I shall take his place, and never abandon you. How can I ever repay you for the happiness which you give me? Let there be no more restraint, my own Marguerite; we love one another; what does anything else matter to us?"

"Yes, I love you, my own Armand," she murmured, throwing her arms around my neck; "I love you as I never believed I could love. We will be happy, we will live quietly, and I shall forever abandon a life for which I now blush. But you will never reproach me with my past career?"

My tears prevented me from answering; I could only reply by pressing Marguerite to my heart.

"Now," she said, turning to Prudence, and in a voice full of emotion, "you may go and tell the Duke what you have seen, and you will add that we no longer need him."

From that day the Duke's name was no longer mentioned. Marguerite ceased to be the girl I had known. She avoided everything that could have recalled those scenes amongst which I had met her. Never did a wife or a sister show to a husband or a brother a greater affection or more care. Her morbid temperament took

quickly every impression and was susceptible of every feeling. She had broken with her friends and no longer had the same habits, used the same language, and spent as much money as formerly. People who saw us leave the house to go on the river in the charming little boat I had bought, would never have believed that this woman, dressed in white, wearing a large straw hat, and carrying on her arm a plain silk jacket to protect her against the cold and damp air, was the same Marguerite Gautier who only four months ago had been notorious for her extravagance and riotous way of living.

Alas! we made haste to be happy, as if we foresaw that it would not last long.

For two months we did not even visit Paris. No one came to see us except Prudence and this Julie Duprat, whose name I already have mentioned to you, and to whom Marguerite intrusted the touching diary, now in my possession.

I spent whole days at the feet of my mistress. We opened the windows which looked out on the garden; and while the sunny summer made the flowers bud, even underneath the trees, we stood side by side and inhaled a breath of that real life which neither Marguerite nor myself had understood till then.

This young woman displayed a childish astonishment at the smallest trifles, and on certain days would run about the garden like a girl of ten, chasing a butterfly or a dragonfly. This courtesan, on whose bouquets more money had been spent than could have easily supported a whole family, would sometimes sit down on the grass examining for a whole hour the simple flower whose name she bore.

About this time she often read "Manon Lescaut." I surprised her many times annotating this book; and she

always observed to me, that when a woman loves she cannot do what Manon Lescaut did.

The Duke sent her two or three letters; but she recognized the handwriting and handed them to me without reading them.

Sometimes the contents of these letters caused tears to come to my eyes.

By not allowing Marguerite any more money, the Duke thought he would compel her to come back; but when he saw how useless his plan was, he could no longer hold out, wrote to her and asked permission to visit her as before, on whatever conditions she might propose.

I read these letters, so full of entreaty, which always told the same thing. I tore them up without letting Marguerite know their contents, and without advising her to see again the old man, although a feeling of pity for his sorrows inclined me to do so; but I feared she might consider this advice as a suggestion that the Duke, when visiting her as formerly, should also defray her household expenses. I dreaded, above all, that she would think me capable of declining the responsibility of her life, and all the consequences into which her love for me might lead me.

The Duke, not receiving any answer, ceased to write to Marguerite, and we continued to live together without troubling ourselves about the future.

CHAPTER XVIII.

To describe our new manner of living in detail would be a very difficult matter. It consisted of a series of childish actions, charming for us, but insignificant to others. You know what it is to love, you know how rapidly the days pass, and with what enamored indolence a man allows one day to flow into another. You are not ignorant of that forgetfulness of all things which springs from a passionate, unsuspecting, and mutual affection. Every human being, except the loved one, seems superfluous in creation. You regret having formerly frittered away portions of your heart upon other women, and you do not believe that you can ever press another hand than the one you now clasp. Neither labor nor reflection disturb the brain; nothing, in fact, can chase away the only thought which constantly pervades the mind. Each day the lover discovers in his mistress a fresh charm, an unknown attraction.

Existence becomes merely a repetition of the realization of a continuous desire; the soul is merely a vestal virgin who has to keep alive the sacred flame of love.

We frequently went and sat down in the little wood which overlooked our cottage. There we both listened to the joyous melodies of the evening, whilst thinking of the approaching hour which was to lock us in each other's arms till the morrow. Sometimes we remained in bed all day, without even allowing the rays of the sun to penetrate our room. The curtains were drawn quite close, and for

us there existed no outer world. Only Nanine was allowed to enter our room, and to bring us our meals, which we took without rising, interrupting them constantly by laughter and merriment. Then, we went to sleep for a few moments; for, wholly possessed by our passion, we were like two stubborn divers who only appear above the water to take breath.

Nevertheless, now and then, I observed Marguerite looking very sad, and even weeping; I asked her the cause of this sudden grief, and she replied:

"My dear Armand, our love is not an ordinary passion; you love me as if I had never belonged to any one else, and I tremble lest, later on, you should repent of your love, reproach me with my past life, and compel me to resume that way of living from which you rescued me. Consider that now I have tasted the charms of another existence, I should die if I were to go back to my old career. Tell me again that you will never leave me."

"I swear it to you!"

At these words she looked at me, as if to read in my eyes if I was sincere in taking this oath; then she threw herself into my arms, and, hiding her face on my breast, said:

"You do not know how much I love you."

One evening we were leaning on the balcony of our window looking at the moon, which seemed to have some difficulty in piercing the clouds, and listening to the wind rustling in the trees. We held each other's hands, and, for perhaps a quarter of an hour, did not say a word; then Marguerite observed to me:

"Winter will soon be here. Shall we leave this?"

"Where shall we go?"

"To Italy."

"Are you tired of this place?"

"I dread the winter, and, above all, our return to Paris."

"Why?"

"For many reasons."

And she added abruptly, without giving any grounds for her fears:

"Will you go? I shall sell everything I possess and we will go and live in Italy. Nothing will remain then of my former career, and no one will know who I am. Should you like to go?"

"Let us go away if it pleases you, Marguerite," I said; "but why need you sell those things which you will be glad to find again on your return? My fortune is not large enough to accept such a sacrifice; yet I have sufficient money to allow us to travel in good style for five or six months, if this will give you any pleasure."

"After all, we'd better not go," she continued, leaving the window and seating herself upon the couch at the further end of the room. "What is the use of spending money in travelling? I cost you quite enough here."

"To tell me so, Marguerite, is not generous on your part."

"Forgive me, my friend," she replied, offering me her hand; "this oppressive weather affects my nerves. My words do not express what I meant to say."

And, after embracing me, she fell into a profound reverie.

Such scenes were not rare, and, though I was unaware of their cause, I nevertheless detected in Marguerite feelings of anxiety about the future. She could not doubt my love, for it increased every day, and yet I often found her sad: she always attributed this sadness to some physical cause, without giving any other reason for it.

Fearing that she might become weary of too monoton-

ous a life, I proposed that we should return to Paris; but she invariably rejected this proposal, and assured me she could nowhere else be so happy as in the country.

Prudence did not come often, but to make up for it wrote many letters, which I never asked to see, though Margeurite was always buried in thought after receiving them; I could not tell why.

One day Marguerite kept her room. When I entered I found her writing.

"To whom are you writing?" I asked.

"To Prudence. Should you like to read what I have written?"

I dreaded anything that might appear suspicious, and I therefore replied to Marguerite that I did not wish to know what she had been writing; but, nevertheless, I felt quite certain that this letter would have told me the real cause of her sadness.

Next day the weather was very fine. Marguerite proposed that we should take a boat and visit the Isle of Croissy. She seemed in good spirits, and we did not return till five o'clock.

"Madame Duvernoy has been here," said Nanine, as soon as we returned.

"Has she left?" asked Marguerite.

"Yes; she left in your carriage, Madame; she said you knew all about it."

"That will do," replied Marguerite, quickly. "Let us have dinner."

Two days afterwards Prudence sent a letter, and during the next fortnight Marguerite seemed not to suffer from any of those mysterious fits of melancholy for which she never ceased to apologize, now that she was no longer attacked by them.

The carriage was never sent back, however.

"Why does Prudence not send back your brougham?" I asked one day.

"One of the horses is ill, and the carriage wants repairing, which can better be done whilst we are still here and need no carriage, instead of waiting till we return to Paris."

Prudence paid us a visit a few days afterwards, and confirmed all that Marguerite had told me.

The two ladies walked by themselves in the garden, and when I joined them they changed their conversation.

Prudence went away in the evening, and as she said she felt cold, she asked Marguerite to lend her a cashmere shawl.

Another month passed, and during that time Marguerite was in a better temper and more affectionate than ever.

But the carriage did not come back, neither was the cashmere shawl returned, and this puzzled me. As I knew where Marguerite kept Prudence's letters, I took advantage of a moment when she was at the bottom of the garden to go to her drawer and endeavor to open it; but it was in vain, for it was locked.

I then looked in the drawers where she kept her jewelry and her diamonds, and I opened them without any difficulty; but neither the jewel-cases, nor, of course, the jewels were there.

A poignant feeling of anxiety throbbed through my heart.

I would have asked Marguerite what had become of all these things, but she certainly would not have told me the truth.

"My dear Marguerite," I said to her, "I want you to allow me to go to Paris. My servant does not know where I am, and I am almost sure to find some of my

father's letters at my rooms; for he is, no doubt, uneasy about me, and I had better answer them."

"Go, my friend," she replied; "but come back as soon as you can."

I went.

I immediately hastened to Prudence's house.

"Now," I said, without any preliminaries, "answer me frankly. Where are Marguerite's horses?"

"They are sold."

"And the cashmere shawl?"

"Sold."

"And the diamonds?"

"Pledged."

"And who has sold and pledged all these things?"

"I did."

"Why did you not let me know this before?"

"Marguerite told me not to do so."

"Why did you not ask me for money?"

"Because she would not allow it."

"What has become of all the money?"

"Paid away."

"Does she owe a great deal?"

"About thirty thousand francs still. Ah, my dear fellow, I told you so, but you would not believe me. I hope that now you are convinced. The upholsterer whom the Duke had promised to pay was shown the door when he called to see him, and next day received a letter telling him that the Duke would not pay anything for Mademoiselle Gautier. The man insisted upon having his money, and we gave him on account the few thousand francs I borrowed from you; but some kind friends informed him that Marguerite was no longer with the Duke, and was living with a penniless young man. The other creditors were told the same thing. They insisted upon having their money,

and seized the furniture. Marguerite wished to sell everything, but she could no longer do so; and, besides, I would have objected to it. She had, however, to pay; and as she did not like to ask you for any money, she sold her horses, her cashmere-shawls, and pledged her jewels. Should you like to see the receipts and the pawn-tickets?"

And Prudence, opening a drawer, showed them to me.

"You fancy," she continued with the persistency of a woman who feels that she was quite right in her argument, "you fancy that a young man and woman have nothing else to do than to be in love with one another, and go and lead a pastoral and dreamy life in the country. No, my friend, no; there is a material as well as an ideal life, and the purest intentions are kept down by ridiculously thin but very strong threads, not easily broken. If Marguerite has not deceived you a score of times, it is because she is quite an exception to the general rule. I advised her often to do so, for it pained me to see the poor girl strip herself of everything, but she would not hear of it, always replied that she loved you, and would not deceive you for anything in the world. All this is very pretty and very poetical, but she cannot pay her creditors with such coin; and now she does not know what to do unless she can lay her hand on about thirty thousand francs."

"Then I will give her that sum."

"You will have to borrow it."

"Yes."

"That will be a very nice business! You will quarrel with your father, and cripple your resources; and, moreover, one does not find thirty thousand francs in a day. Listen to me, my dear Armand; I know women better than you do; be reasonable, and do not commit a folly which you will one day repent. I do not tell you to leave Marguerite,

but to live with her as you did at the beginning of the summer. Let her find means to escape from her difficulties. The Duke will gradually come back to her; the Count de N——, who has an income of two hundred thousand francs, only told me yesterday that, if she accepts him, he will pay all her debts, and give her four or five thousand francs a month. That would be a position for her; while it is certain that you will have to leave her one day or other. What is the use of waiting till you are ruined? Besides, the Count de N—— is a noodle, and nothing prevents you from still remaining Marguerite's lover. She will weep a little to begin with; but she will get accustomed to this mode of life and thank you one day for what you have done. You have only to imagine that Marguerite is a married woman, and that you are deceiving her husband; that is all.

"I told you all this before, but then I merely advised you; now it has almost become a necessity."

Prudence was merciless; but she was right.

"You see," she continued, putting away the papers she had shown me, "demireps always foresee that they will be loved, but never that they themselves will love; or, otherwise, they would lay by money, and, when they are thirty, could afford themselves the luxury of having a lover who does not pay them. If I had only known formerly what I do now! One bit of advice more; say nothing to Marguerite, but take her back to Paris. You have lived five or six months with her, and you have no reason to complain. Only shut your eyes; that is all you have to do. In a fortnight she will accept the offer of the Count de N——, lay by some money this winter, and next summer you can begin again. That is the way to manage such things, my dear fellow."

And Prudence seemed quite delighted to have given me this advice, which I rejected with indignation.

Not only would neither my love nor my dignity permit me to adopt such a course, but I was quite certain that Marguerite, as she felt then, would sooner die than consent to such a partition.

"You have been joking long enough," I said to Prudence, "tell me how much Marguerite really needs."

"I have told you. About thirty thousand francs."

"And when will she require that sum?"

"Within two months."

"She shall have it."

Prudence shrugged her shoulders.

"I will give you the money," I continued, "but you must pledge me your word not to tell Marguerite that it comes from me."

"Make yourself easy on that score."

"Let me also know if she sends anything more to be sold or pledged."

"There is no danger of that. She has nothing more left."

I then went to my rooms to see if there were any letters from my father.

There were four.

CHAPTER XIX.

In the first three letters my father expressed uneasiness at my silence, and asked the reason of it; in his last he hinted that people had told him of my present way of living, and informed me that he would very shortly come to Paris. I always felt a great respect and sincere affection for my father; I replied to him, therefore, that I had not answered his letters because I had been taking a little excursion, and I begged him to let me know what day he intended to come, in order that I might go and meet him.

I gave my servant my address in the country, and told him to bring me any letter that should arrive with the postmark of my native town; then I started immediately for Bougival.

I found Marguerite waiting for me at the garden-gate.

Her countenance betrayed anxiety. She threw her arms around my neck, and could not refrain from asking:

"Have you seen Prudence?"

"No."

"You have been a long time in Paris."

"I had to answer some of my father's letters which I found at my rooms."

A few minutes afterwards, Nanine entered quite out of breath; Marguerite rose and whispered something to her.

When Nanine was gone, Marguerite seated herself again close to me, took my hand, and said:

"Why did you deceive me? You have seen Prudence."

"Who told you?"

"Nanine."

"And how does she know?"

"She followed you."

"You told her, then, to follow me?"

"Yes, I did. I thought there must be some powerful motive to induce you to go to Paris; you, who never left me once for four months. I was afraid that some misfortune had happened to you, or that, perhaps, you went to see another woman."

"How childish you are!"

"I am no longer uneasy; I know what you have done, but I do not know what Prudence has told you."

I showed Marguerite my father's letters.

"That is not what I ask you. What I want to know is why did you call on Prudence?"

"To see her."

"You do not speak the truth, my friend."

"Well! I went to ask her if your horse was getting better, and if she had any further need of your cashmere shawls and your jewels."

Marguerite blushed, but made no reply.

"She told me," I continued, "what you have done with your horses, your shawls, and your diamonds."

"Are you angry?"

"I am angry because you never thought of asking me for what you wanted."

"If a woman, in a 'liaison' like ours, has still a little self-respect left, she ought to submit to every possible sacrifice rather than ask money from her lover and appear to be mercenary. You love me, I am sure, but you do not know how fragile is the tie which secures an affection for girls like I am. Perhaps some day, when you are short of money or feel very dull, you may possibly imagine that our 'liaison' was an artfully arranged calculation on my

part! Prudence cannot keep a secret. What do I want with horses? I can very well do without them, and shall have nothing more to spend for their keep; so I save money by their being sold. All that I ask of you is to love me, and you will love me just as well without my having any horses, shawls, or diamonds."

All this was said so unaffectedly, that the tears came into my eyes whilst listening to her.

"But, sweet Marguerite," I replied, as I affectionately pressed her hands, "you must have known that, one day or other, I should hear what sacrifice you were making, and that, as soon as I knew of it, I would not permit it."

"Why?"

"Because, my dear girl, I do not intend that the affection which you are good enough to entertain for me should deprive you even of a single trinket. I also do not wish that some day when you are in want of money or feel very dull, you might imagine that if you had been living with another man such things would not have happened, and that you should repent, if but for a single moment, ever to have known me. In a few days your horses, your jewels, and your cashmere shawls will be restored to you. They are as necessary to you as the air you breathe; and, although what I am about to say may appear ridiculous, I love you better splendidly dressed than simply attired."

"Then you love me no longer?"

"How foolish you are!"

"If you love me, you would allow me to love you as I want to; but, on the contrary, you continue to see in me only a girl to whom appearances are indispensable, and whom you still imagine you are obliged to pay. You are ashamed to accept any proofs of my love. In spite of yourself, you think you might leave me one day; and, therefore,

your delicate feelings of honor must be kept beyond all suspicion. You are right, my friend, but I expected something better from you."

Marguerite made a movement to rise from her seat, but I prevented her, saying:

"I wish you to be happy and to have nothing to reproach me with."

"And we are about to part!"

"Why, Marguerite, who can separate us?" I exclaimed.

"You, who will not allow me to understand your position and are vain enough to keep me in mine; you, who in keeping up the splendor in which I have lived, wish to preserve the moral distance which separates us; you, in short, who do not believe sufficiently in the disinterestedness of my affection to share with me your income with which we could live happily together; but who prefer to ruin yourself in obedience to a ridiculous prejudice. Do you suppose then that there is a comparison between a carriage or trinkets and your love? Do you imagine that my happiness consists in the vanities which satisfy us when we love nothing, but which become of no value when we really do love? You will pay my debts; you will borrow money on the security of your capital: you will, in fact, keep me! How long will this last? Two or three months, and then it will be too late to adopt the life I propose to you; for then you will have to accept everything from me, and a man of honor cannot do that. Now you have still an income of eight or ten thousand francs, and with this we can live. I will sell all that I do not want, and can realize from this sale sufficient to bring me in about two thousand francs a year. We will take a pretty little suite of rooms where we can live together. In the summer we will go the country; not in a house like this, but in a little cottage large enough for two persons.

You are independent; I am free; we are young. For Heaven's sake, Armand, do not throw me back into the life I was formerly compelled to lead!"

I could make no reply; tears of gratitude and love filled my eyes, and I threw myself into Marguerite's arms.

"I wish," she resumed, "everything could have been arranged without your knowing about it; and that I could have paid my debts and got my new rooms in order. We should then have gone to Paris in October, and all would have been settled; but, as Prudence has told you everything, you will have to accept my proposal now instead of afterwards. Do you love me sufficiently to do so?"

It was impossible to resist such magnanimity. I kissed Marguerite's hand repeatedly, and replied:

"I will do whatever you wish."

It was, therefore, agreed that she should do as she liked.

Then she became wild with joy; she danced, she sang, she was delighted at the idea of the quiet new rooms she was going to have, and began to consult me already as to their arrangement, and in what neighborhood I would like them to be.

I saw that she was happy and proud to have taken this resolution, which it seemed was going to unite us more closely.

I did not wish to be less generous than she had shown herself.

That very moment I settled what my future was going to be. I calculated what money I had, and determined to make over to Marguerite the income my mother had left me, which seemed to me barely sufficient to recompense her for the sacrifice I accepted.

Then there would remain to me the five thousand

francs my father allowed me yearly, and which was enough to live upon whatever might happen.

I did not tell Marguerite what I had resolved to do, for I was convinced she would refuse my gift.

My mother had left me a sum of sixty thousand francs, which was put out on mortgage on a house I had never even seen. All I knew was that each quarter-day an old friend of our family, who was also my father's lawyer, handed me seven hundred and fifty francs, for which I gave him a receipt.

The very day Marguerite and I went to Paris to look for rooms I paid a visit to this lawyer, and asked him what I would have to do to transfer this income to another person.

The worthy man supposed me to be ruined, and questioned me why I wanted to do this. As sooner or later it would have been necessary to tell him to whom I wanted to transfer the money, I preferred to let him know the whole truth at once. He made none of those objections which his position as a lawyer and a friend might have authorized, and assured me that he would arrange it all as well as he could.

I, of course, recommended him not to say a word about this transaction to my father; and I went to meet Marguerite, who was waiting for me at Julie Duprat's, where she preferred stopping rather than to go and listen to Prudence preaching to her.

We commenced to hunt for apartments. Marguerite found every suite of rooms we looked at too expensive, and I thought they were too mean. Nevertheless, we agreed at last; and determined to take a small detached cottage standing in its own grounds, in one of the most quiet neighborhoods of Paris.

Behind this small detached cottage was a beautiful

garden, surrounded by walls sufficiently high to separate us from our neighbors and low enough to allow us to look at what was going on.

It was much better than we had any right to expect.

Whilst I went to my own rooms to give notice of my leaving, Marguerite hastened to call on some agent, who, according to her, had arranged for one of her friends what she was going to ask him to do for herself.

I waited for her in my rooms, and she came back delighted. This agent had promised her to pay all her debts, to hand her the receipts for them, and, moreover, to give her twenty thousand francs, provided she gave up to him all her furniture.

You know by the amount the sale realized that this honest man would have made more than thirty thousand francs out of his customer.

We went back to Bougival in the best of tempers, and continued to discuss our plans for the future, which, thanks to our want of experience, and especially to our mutual love, we beheld in the most glowing colors.

A week afterwards, whilst we were at breakfast, Nanine told me that my servant wanted to see me.

He was shown in.

"Sir," said he, "your father has arrived in town, and begs you to come at once to your apartments, where he awaits you."

This news was the simplest in the world, but on hearing it Marguerite and I looked at each other.

We had a foreboding of some misfortune which was going to happen to us.

Though she did not mention to me the impression this message had made upon her, as well as on me, I said, as I took her hand:

"Fear nothing."

"Return as soon as you can," Marguerite murmured, embracing me. "I shall watch for you at the window."

I sent Joseph to say I was coming.

Two hours afterwards I was in the Rue de Provence.

CHAPTER XX.

I FOUND my father, in his dressing-gown, engaged in writing in my sitting-room.

I perceived at once by the way in which he looked at me, as I came in, that he had something important to say to me.

However, as if his countenance had not betrayed him, I went up to him and embraced him.

"When did you arrive, father?"

"Last evening."

"You came directly here, as usual?"

"Yes."

"I very much regret that I was not here to meet you."

I expected to receive at once the lecture which the stern countenance of my father foreshadowed, but he made no reply, sealed the letter he had just written, and gave it to Joseph to take to the post.

When we were alone, my father rose, and, leaning against the mantelpiece, said:

"My dear Armand, I want to talk to you about something very important."

"I am listening, father."

"Will you promise me to be candid?"

"I always am."

"Is it true that you are living with a woman named Marguerite Gautier?"

"Yes."

"Do you know what this woman has been?"

"A demirep."

"Is it for her sake that this year you have neglected to come and pay a visit to your sister and to me?"

"Yes, father, I confess it."

"You love this woman, then, very much?"

"The proof that I do so, father, is that it has made me neglect a sacred duty, for which I humbly ask your pardon."

My father evidently had not expected to receive such explicit replies, for he seemed to reflect for a moment, and then said:

"You do not suppose that you can always live thus?"

"I am afraid I cannot, father, but I did suppose it."

"You must also have been aware," continued my father, in a somewhat sterner tone, "that I should not permit such conduct."

"As long as I do nothing to injure your fair name, and the traditional honor of the family, I thought I could live as I like; and this idea has somewhat allayed my fear."

Passion enables a man to withstand sentiment. I was prepared for any struggle, even against my father, so as not to lose Marguerite.

"Now the time has come for you to lead a different life."

"Why, father?"

"Because you are on the point of doing certain things which are contrary to the respect which you profess for your family."

"I do not understand what you mean."

"I will explain. That you have a mistress may be all very well; that you pay, as a gentleman, for the favors of such a girl, is also quite right; but that you neglect the most sacred duties for her sake, that you permit the report of your disgraceful conduct to reach even the provincial town where I dwell, and to cast a dark stain on

the honorable name which I have given you, I cannot and will not allow."

"Permit me to say, father, that those who have spread such reports about me are ill-informed. It is quite true that I am the lover of Mademoiselle Gautier and live with her; but I do not allow her to pass under your name and mine. The money I spend on her does not exceed my means; I have not incurred a single debt, nor, in short, do I find myself in such a dilemma as to authorize a father to say to his son what you just now said to me."

"A father is always authorized to turn his son away from the evil ways on which he is about to enter. You have not yet done any harm, but you are about to do so."

"Father!"

"Sir, I know life better than you do. Only pure and modest women can have chaste feelings. Every Manon can make a Des Grieux, and times and manners have changed. It would be useless for the world to grow older if it did not also become better. You will give up your mistress."

"I regret I shall have to disobey you, father; but that is impossible."

"I shall compel you to do so."

"Unhappily, father, there are no longer any Isles Sainte-Marguerite to which they can transport courtesans; and even if now there were any, I should accompany Mademoiselle Gautier if you sent her thither. I cannot help it; I may be wrong, but I cannot be happy except by remaining the lover of this girl."

"Come, Armand, open your eyes; recognize your father, who has always loved you, and only desires your happiness. Is it creditable for you to live with a girl who has been everybody's love?"

"What does it matter, father, provided she is now no

longer anybody's? What does it matter, provided this girl loves me, and through her love for me, and the love I have for her, becomes regenerated? In short, what does it matter, as long as she has become converted?"

"Do you think then, sir, that it is the mission of a man of honor to convert courtesans? Do you think Providence has sent us into the world for such an absurd purpose, and that we should feel no other enthusiasm? What will be the conclusion of this marvellous cure, and what will you think, when you are forty, of what you have just now been saying? You will laugh at your love, if you still can laugh, and if it has not left too deep a mark on our past career. What would you be now, if your father had had the same ideas, and had abandoned himself to every breath of passion, instead of settling his career firmly on a basis of honor and honesty? Reflect, Armand, and utter no more such absurdities. Come, you will leave this woman. Your father entreats you!"

I made no reply.

"Armand," continued my father, "in the name of your sainted mother, I beg you to abandon this mode of living which is wholly impracticable in theory, but to which you are fettered, and which you will forget sooner than you imagine. You are twenty-four; think of your future; you cannot always love this woman, who, on the other hand, will not always love you. You both exaggerate your love. You shut yourself out from every career. If you take one step more, you will no longer be able to quit the path you now tread, and for the rest of your life the remorse of your lost youth will haunt you. Leave Paris and spend a month or two with your sister. Rest and the care and affection of your family will soon cure you of this fitful fever, for it is nothing else.

"In the meanwhile your mistress will console herself

and take another lover. Then, when you will have discovered for whose sake you have nearly quarrelled with your father and lost his affection, you will tell me that I did quite right to come and take you away, and you will thank me for having done so.

"I trust therefore, Armand, that you will leave town with me."

I felt that my father was right, as far as most women were concerned, but I was convinced that he was wrong with regard to Marguerite. Still he had uttered his last words in such a gentle and pitiful tone of voice that I dared not reply.

"Well?" he said, in a tone full of emotion.

"Well, father, I can promise you nothing," I replied at last; "what you ask is beyond my power. Believe me," I continued, on seeing him make a gesture of impatience, "you exaggerate the result of this 'liaison.' Marguerite is not so bad as you think her. This love instead of leading me wrong, is, on the contrary, capable of developing in me the most honorable sentiments. True love always makes a man better, whatever may be the woman who inspires it. If you knew Marguerite, you would admit that I am in no danger, for she is as noble-minded as the noblest of women. Other women of her class are very grasping, but she is disinterestedness itself."

"Which does not prevent her accepting your entire fortune, for the sixty thousand francs you inherited from your mother, and which you wish to settle on her, are your entire fortune, I repeat; so let those words sink into your mind."

My father probably kept this peroration and threat to the last.

I could much better resist his threats than his entreaties.

"Who told you I was about to settle this money on her?" I asked.

"My lawyer. Do you think that an honest man would have done such a thing without letting me know? I came here to prevent your ruining yourself for this girl. When your mother died she left you enough to live honorably, but not enough to squander it on your mistresses."

"I assure you, father, that Marguerite was not aware of my intentions."

"Then why do you want to settle this sum on her?"

"Because this woman whom you calumniate, and whom you wish me to abandon, has sacrificed every thing she had in the world to go and live with me."

"And you accept such a sacrifice! Are you not ashamed, sir, to permit such a woman as Marguerite Gautier to sacrifice anything for you? Come, this is enough. You must leave this woman. A few minutes ago I entreated you, now I command you. I will not allow such a disgraceful behavior in my family. Order your things to be packed, and prepare to leave town with me."

"Pardon me, father, but I will not go."

"Why not?"

"Because I am of an age when I am no longer bound to obey a command."

My father turned pale at this reply.

"Very good, sir; I know now what I have to do."

He rang the bell.

Joseph made his appearance.

"Take my luggage to the Hotel de Paris," he said to my servant. Then he entered my bedroom and dressed himself.

When he came out I went up to him, and said:

"Promise me, father, not to do anything that will pain Marguerite?"

My father stopped, cast on me a contemptuous glance, and merely replied:

"I believe you are insane."

He went out, slamming the door with all his might.

I then left my rooms, took a cab, and drove to Bougival.

Marguerite was waiting for me at the window.

CHAPTER XXI.

"At length," she cried, embracing me. "How pale you are!"

I then related to her the scene between me and my father.

"Good Heavens! I thought as much," she replied. "When Joseph came to tell us your father had arrived I started as if I had heard that some misfortune was going to happen. Poor friend! and it is I who am the cause of all this grief. Perhaps you would have done better to abandon me than to quarrel with your father. Still, I have done him no harm. We are living very quietly; we will live still more so. He knows well enough that you will have a mistress, and he ought to be glad that it is me, because I love you, and wish for nothing but what you can afford. Did you tell him how we had planned the future?"

"Yes; and that made him more angry than anything else, for in this determination he saw the proof of our mutual love."

"What is to be done then?"

"We must remain together, my darling Marguerite, and let the storm pass over."

"But will it pass over?"

"It must."

"But will your father remain quiet?"

"What do you suppose he will do?"

"How should I know? Everything a father can do to make a son obey him. He will remind you of my past life,

and perhaps do me the honor of inventing some fresh story about me, that you may abandon me."

"You know that I love you."

"Yes; but I also know that sooner or later you will have to obey your father, and, perhaps, you will finally allow him to convince you."

"No, Marguerite; it is I who will convince him. He is now very angry because a few of his friends have been telling some stories about me; but he is kind, just, and will abandon his first impression. Besides, after all, what does it matter to me?"

"Don't say that, Armand; I would much prefer not to have it said that I had been the cause of your quarrelling with your family. Remain here to-day, and return to-morrow to Paris. Your father will have reflected, and so will you; and perhaps both of you will come to a better understanding. Don't shock his principles; pretend to make some concessions to him; make it appear that you do not care so very much for me, and he will leave things as they are. Don't be despondent, my friend, and be quite certain of one thing, that, happen what may, your Marguerite will never abandon you."

"You swear it?"

"Need I swear it?"

How pleasant it is to allow one's self to be convinced by the voice of the woman we love! Marguerite and I passed the whole day in talking over our projects, as if we were aware of the necessity of realizing them as soon as possible. Every moment we expected something to happen, but luckily the day passed without any new incident.

The next day I left at ten o'clock, and about twelve arrived at the hotel.

My father had already gone out.

I went to my rooms, where I thought I might possibly

find him. No one had been there; I called upon the lawyer, but he was not there.

I returned to the hotel, and waited till six o'clock, but Monsieur Duval did not make his appearance.

I started back to Bougival.

I found Marguerite, not waiting for me as she had done the day before, but seated near the fire, which had been lit, as it was already chilly.

She was so absorbed in thought that I came quite close to her chair without her hearing me or turning round. When I kissed her on the forehead, she started as if this kiss had suddenly awakened her.

"You frighten me," she said. "Have you seen your father?"

"I have not. I do not know what it means; for he was neither at his hotel not at any of the places where I could possibly have met him."

"Then you had better try again and see him to-morrow."

"I have a great mind to wait until he sends for me. I have done all that can be expected of me."

"No, my friend, you have not done enough; go and try again to see your father, especially to-morrow."

"Why to-morrow more than any other day?"

"Because," said Marguerite, who appeared to blush a little at this question, "because this perseverance on your part will produce a better impression, and we may be pardoned sooner."

During the remainder of the day Marguerite was preoccupied, absent-minded, and sad. I was obliged to repeat more than once what I had to say to her before I could get any answer. She attributed this preoccupation to her anxiety for the future, an anxiety caused by the events of the last two days.

I spent the night in trying to reassure her; but she urged me to start the next morning, and was so restless that I could not account for it.

My father was again absent that day as he had been the day before; but he had left the following letter for me:

"If you call on me to-day, wait till four o'clock; if I have not returned then, come and dine with me to-morrow; I wish to speak to you."

I waited till four o'clock; but as my father had not made his appearance I went away.

The day before Marguerite had been sad, but to-day I perceived that she was feverish and agitated. On seeing me enter, she flung her arms around my neck, and remained for some time in my embrace weeping.

I asked what was the cause of this sudden grief, of which the paroxysm alarmed me. She did not give me any sensible reason for it, but brought forward everything a woman can invent when she does not wish to speak the truth.

After she had become a little more quiet, I related to her the results of my journey, and showed her my father's letter, whilst observing that our prospects were looking brighter.

At the sight of this letter, and on hearing my observations, the tears began again to flow so fast that, dreading a nervous attack, I had to call Nanine, and we carried to bed the poor girl, who all the time was crying without saying a single word, but was holding my hands and kissing them every moment.

I asked Nanine if her mistress had received any letter or visit during my absence that could account for the state I found her in, but she replied that no one had called, and

no letter had come. I felt almost sure that the day before something must have happened, and this surmise made me the more uneasy as Marguerite concealed from me what it was.

She appeared a little more collected in the evening, and, making me sit by her side, assured me again and again that she loved me. She then smiled on me, but with an effort, for in spite of herself her eyes filled with tears.

In vain were all my endeavors to induce her to let me know the real cause of her grief; she persisted in giving me the same vague reasons I have already mentioned.

She finally fell asleep in my arms, but it was a sleep exhausting the body instead of recruiting it. From time to time she uttered a cry, awoke with a start, and when she saw that I was with her, made me swear to love her always.

I was greatly perplexed by these intermittent paroxysms of grief, which lasted until morning. Then Marguerite fell into a doze; she had not slept for two nights.

Her rest did not last long.

About eleven o'clock Marguerite awoke, and seeing me rise from my chair, looked around her and exclaimed:

"Are you going already?"

"No," I said, taking her hands, "but I did not wish to disturb your rest. It is early yet."

"At what o'clock are you going to Paris?"

At four o'clock."

"So soon! You will remain with me till then, won't you?"

"Of course. Don't I usually do so?"

"I feel so happy!"

"Shall we have breakfast?" she asked in an absent manner.

"Just as you like."

"And you will give me many kisses until you are going?"

"Yes, and I will come back as soon as possible."

"You will come back?" she said, looking at me with haggard eyes.

"Of course."

"That is all right! You will come back to-night, and I shall wait for you as usual, and you will love me, and we shall be as happy as we ever have been since we knew each other."

Every word she said was uttered in such an hysterical manner, that it seemed to conceal some painful idea, over which she had been brooding a long time, and I trembled each moment to see Marguerite become delirious.

"Listen," I said to her, "you are ill; I cannot leave you thus; I will write to my father, and tell him not to expect me."

"No! no!" she exclaimed suddenly. "Don't do that. Your father would again accuse me of preventing your going to him when he wishes to see you. No, no, you must go! Besides, I am not ill; I am quite well; I have only had a bad dream, and I was not quite awake."

From that moment Marguerite tried to appear more cheerful, and wept no longer.

When it was time for me to go, I embraced her, and asked her if she would like to accompany me to the railway station. I fancied that the walk might benefit her, and that the air would do her good.

I was especially anxious to remain with her as long as possible.

She accepted my offer, put on her cloak, and accompanied me with Nanine, so that she might not return alone.

Twenty times I was on the point of staying with her.

But the expectation of returning soon, and the fear of once more making my father angry, urged me to go, and I left by the train.

"I will see you again to-night," I said to Marguerite on bidding her good-bye. She made no reply.

Once before she had not answered me when I used the same words, and perhaps you may remember that the Count de G—— had stopped with her that night. But this happened so long ago that it seemed blotted out from my memory; and if I feared anything, it certainly was not that Marguerite would deceive me.

I arrived in Paris, and hastened to Prudence, in order to beg her to go to Bougival, hoping that her good temper and liveliness would drive away Marguerite's fit of melancholy.

I entered her rooms without being announced, and found Prudence dressing.

"Hello!" she said to me, with some uneasiness, "is Marguerite not with you?"

"No."

"How is she?"

"She is not very well."

"Is she not coming?"

"Did you expect her?"

Madame Duvernoy blushed, and replied, with some hesitation:

"I want to know if she will not come and meet you here, as you are in Paris?"

"No."

I looked at Prudence; she cast down her eyes, and thought I read on her countenance that she was afraid I should stop for any length of time.

"I even came to ask you, my dear Prudence, to go and see Marguerite this afternoon if you have nothing else to

do. You will keep her company, and you might stop to-night at Bougival. I never saw her in such a state as she is in to-day, and I dread her falling ill."

"I am dining out to-day," replied Prudence; "it is therefore impossible for me to go and see Marguerite this evening; but I will call on her to-morrow."

I took leave of Madame Duvernoy, who seemed to me almost as preoccupied as Marguerite had been, and I went to call on my father, who looked at me very attentively.

He held out his hand.

"Your two visits have pleased me, Armand; they have encouraged me to hope that you have reflected on your side as I have reflected on mine."

"May I be allowed to ask you, father, what has been the result of your reflections?"

"My dear son, to speak the truth, I find that things are not as bad as they have been reported to me, and I have promised myself to be less severe."

"What do you say, father?" I exclaimed, quite delighted.

"I say, my dear boy, that as every young man has a mistress, and after what has been lately told me, I would rather you were the lover of Mademoiselle Gautier than of any other woman."

"My dear father, you make me very happy!"

We conversed thus for a few moments, and then sat down to dinner. My father was in a delightful temper during the whole of dinner-time.

I was in a hurry to return to Bougival to let Marguerite know this happy turn of affairs. I looked every moment at the clock.

"You are looking to see what time it is," said my father; "you are impatient to leave me. Young men will always sacrifice sincere affections to doubtful ones!"

"Don't say that, father! I am sure that Marguerite loves me."

My father made no reply. He appeared neither to doubt nor to believe me.

He strongly insisted on my passing nearly the whole evening with him, and urged me not to return to Bougival till next morning; but I told him that I had left Marguerite very ill, and asked his permission to go back to her early, promising to come and see him the next day.

The weather was very fine, and my father accompanied me to the station. I had never been so happy. The future appeared to me as I had long wished to behold it.

I loved my father more than ever.

When I was about to leave him, he again begged me to remain in town. I refused.

"Are you then so much in love with her?" he asked.

"I love her to distraction."

"Go, then!" and he drew his hand across his brow as if to drive away some thoughts; he then opened his lips as if about to say something, but he only shook my hand and left me abruptly, saying—

"Let me see you to-morrow."

CHAPTER XXII.

To me it seemed that the train did not move.

I reached Bougival at eleven o'clock.

Not a light was to be seen in any of the windows of the cottage, and I rang the bell, but no one came.

It was the first time that such a thing had happened.

At length the gardener appeared, and I entered.

Nanine came to me with a light. I went to Marguerite's room.

"Where is your mistress?"

"She has gone to Paris," replied Nanine.

"To Paris!"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"An hour after you went away."

"Has she left anything for me?"

"Nothing."

Nanine left the room.

She may have imagined, I thought, that the visit to my father, which I told her of, was only an excuse for getting a day's liberty, and may have gone to Paris to find out if I had spoken the truth.

"Perhaps Prudence has written to her on some important business," I said to myself; but I had seen Prudence in town, and she told me nothing to lead me to suppose that she wrote to Marguerite.

Suddenly I remembered that Madame Duvernoy had asked me if Marguerite was not coming to town, when I had told her that she was ill. I recollected at the same

time how perplexed Prudence looked after asking this question, which seemed to hint at some appointment. I also remembered the tears which Marguerite had shed the whole day—tears which the kind reception of my father had partly obliterated from my memory.

From that moment, all that had happened during the day increased my suspicions, and settled them so firmly in my mind that everything, even my father's leniency, confirmed them.

Marguerite had insisted on my going to Paris, and pretended to be quite collected when I proposed to remain with her. Had I fallen into a snare? Was Marguerite deceiving me? Had she calculated on being back in time, so that I would not have noticed her absence, or had chance delayed her? Why had she said nothing to Nanine, and why had she not left a note for me? What was the meaning of those tears, of this absence, of this mystery?

That is what I asked myself, appalled in the midst of that empty room, and my eyes glued to the timepiece which, at midnight, seemed to tell me that it was too late for me to expect my mistress to come back.

However, after the arrangements we had just made, after the sacrifice which she had proposed and I had accepted, was it likely that she would deceive me? No! I endeavored to discard my suspicions.

"The poor girl has found some one to buy her furniture and has gone to Paris to see about it. She did not like to tell me this beforehand, for she knows that though I no longer object to the sale of her goods, so necessary to our future happiness, it is still painful to me; and she may have been afraid of wounding my pride and my delicacy by mentioning it. She prefers to come back when everything is concluded. Prudence evidently expected her, but could not keep her countenance; Marguerite has not been able

to finish her arrangements, and is staying with her, or she may even yet come; for she can very well imagine how unhappy I must feel, and certainly would not leave me in such a state of anxiety.

"But then, why those tears? No doubt, in spite of her love for me, the poor girl cannot help shedding tears at the thought of giving up all that splendor amidst which she has hitherto lived, and which made her happy and envied."

I bore no ill-will to Marguerite for these regrets; I waited for her impatiently, and intended to tell her, whilst loading her with kisses, that I had found out the cause of her mysterious absence.

Still the night wore away and Marguerite did not arrive!

I grew gradually more uneasy, and felt my head and heart throb with anxiety. Perhaps something had happened to her! Perhaps she had been hurt, or was ill, or dead! Perhaps a messenger would come to tell me that she had met with some severe accident! Perhaps dawn would find me in the same uncertainty, and tortured by the same fears!

The idea that Marguerite was deceiving me at the moment I was expecting her, and was quite frightened by her absence, no longer haunted me. Not by her own free will, but through some cause or other beyond her control, she was kept away. The more I thought of it, the more I was convinced that this cause was nothing else than some unforseen accident. Oh, vanity of man! you appear under every form.

One o'clock had just struck. I said to myself I would wait another hour, but that at two o'clock I would start for Paris if Marguerite had not come back.

Meanwhile I looked for a book, for I dared not think.

"Manon Lescaut" lay open on the table. It seemed to

me that tears had been shed on some of its pages. After turning over its leaves I shut the book, and as my suspicions had not been allayed, the characters described in it appeared to me unreal.

Time moved slowly. The sky was overcast, an autumn rain pelted against the windows. The empty bed seemed to me at times to look like a tomb. I began to feel afraid.

I opened the door, listened, and heard nothing but the sound of the wind rustling through the trees. Not a carriage was passing. The half-hour struck mournfully from the church tower.

I was in such a state that I feared some one might enter. It seemed to me that only tidings of an accident could reach me at such an hour, and in such gloomy weather.

Two o'clock struck. I still waited for a short time. Only the ticking of the clock disturbed the silence with its monotonous regular click.

At length I left the room, in which the most trifling objects had assumed that sad aspect which the restless loneliness of the heart imparts to all its surroundings.

In the adjoining room Nanine had fallen asleep over her work. When I opened the door she awoke, and asked if her mistress had returned.

"No; but if she returns, tell her that I was very uneasy about her, and have gone to Paris."

"Are you going at this hour?"

"Yes."

"But how? You won't be able to get a carriage."

"I will go on foot."

"But it rains."

"That does not matter."

"My mistress will return; or if she does not, it will be quite time enough to go and see what has kept her when it is daylight. You will be murdered on the road."

"No fear of that, my dear Nanine. I shall be back to-morrow."

The kind-hearted girl brought me my cloak, threw it over my shoulders, and offered to go to Madame Arnould to see if it were possible to get a carriage; but I would not hear of such a thing, as I was convinced that her errand most likely would be bootless, and that I should thus lose more time than half the journey would take.

Moreover, I required fresh air and bodily fatigue, so as to overcome the excitement under which I labored.

I took the key of the rooms in the Rue d'Antin. Nanine went with me as far as the gate, and after having bade her good-bye I departed.

At first I ran, but as the ground was very damp, as it had been raining, I fatigued myself more than was necessary, and after half-an-hour's run I was obliged to stop, for I was all in a perspiration. I then took breath, and continued my journey. It was so dark that I dreaded every moment to run against one of the trees by the roadside, which, appearing suddenly before my eyes, looked like tall phantoms advancing towards me.

I overtook one or two carrier's carts which I soon left behind me.

A carriage was going at a very smart rate towards Bougival. At the moment it passed, the thought suddenly struck me that Marguerite might be in it.

I stopped and shouted, "Marguerite! Marguerite!"

But no one replied, and the carriage pursued its way. I looked after it till it had disappeared, and then resumed my journey.

It took me two hours to reach the "barrière de l'Etoile."

When I caught a glimpse of Paris I regained my strength, and ran down hill through those long Champs-Elysées I had so often traversed.

That night there was not a soul to be seen.

It seemed as if I were walking through a city of the dead.

Daylight was just appearing.

On reaching the Rue d'Antin, the great metropolis was already beginning to stir, but was not yet quite awake.

The clock of the church of Saint Roch just struck five when I entered Marguerite's house.

I gave my name to the "portier," who had received enough money from me to know that I had a right to visit Mademoiselle Gautier at five o'clock in the morning.

He let me in without any difficulty.

If I had asked if Marguerite was at home, he might have replied that she was not; I therefore preferred remaining in doubt a few minutes longer, for all hope was not lost so long as I was still in doubt.

I put my ear to the door of her rooms, but I could not hear any noise nor anybody stirring.

Everything was as silent as if I were still in the country.

I opened the door and entered.

The curtains were drawn quite close.

I pulled open the dining-room curtains, and then bent my steps towards the bedroom, of which I pushed the door.

I rushed to the window, and violently drew the curtains apart.

I hastened towards the bed, but the dim light hardly permitted me to see anything.

The bed was empty!

I opened the doors one after another, and I searched every room.

No one was there.

It nearly drove me mad.

I entered the dressing-room, of which I opened the window, and called Prudence several times.

Madame Duvernoy's window remained closed.

Then I went down to the "portier," of whom I inquired if Mademoiselle Gautier had called during the day.

"Yes," he replied, "she was with Madame Duvernoy."

"Did she leave any message for me?"

"No."

"Do you know where they have gone to?"

"They went away in a carriage."

"What sort of a carriage?"

"A private carriage."

What did all this mean?

I rung the bell at the next house.

"Whom do you want to see, sir?" asked the "concierge," after letting me in.

"Madame Duvernoy."

"She is not at home."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes, sir, for she has not yet received this letter, which came last night."

And the "portier" showed me a letter on which I involuntarily cast my eyes.

I recognized Marguerite's writing.

I took the letter.

On the outside were written these words:

"To Madame Duvernoy to be given to Monsieur Duval."

"This letter is for me," I said to the "portier," and showed him the direction.

"Are you Monsieur Duval?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Ah! I recognize you now. You often call on Madame Duvernoy."

Directly I was in the street I opened it.

Had a thunderbolt fallen at my feet, I could not have been more shocked than I was at its contents:

"When you read this letter, Armand, I shall already be the mistress of another man. All is therefore at an end between us.

"Go back to your father, my friend; go back to your sister, that young girl so pure, and who ignores even our wretched existence, in whose society you will soon forget what that lost girl, Marguerite Gautier, has made you suffer. You have been kind enough to love Marguerite for a short time, and she is indebted to you for the only happy hours of her life, which she now hopes will not be a long one."

When I read these last words I thought I was becoming mad.

For a moment I really was afraid I should fall to the ground. A mist came over my eyes, and the blood rushed to my head.

At length I recovered myself a little. I looked around me, quite astonished to see that mankind was still moving without stopping to gaze at my misfortune.

I was not strong enough to bear alone the blow which Marguerite had dealt me.

Then I remembered that my father was in the same town as myself, that in ten minutes I might be with him, and that he would sympathize with my sorrows, whatever might have been the cause of them.

I ran like a madman to the Hôtel de Paris, saw that the key of the door of my father's room was outside, and entered.

He was reading.

He seemed not to be very much astonished on seeing me. One might have thought that he expected me.

I threw myself into his arms without saying a word, gave him Marguerite's letter, and falling on his bed, burst into a flood of tears.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Everything in life went on as usual, and yet I could not believe that the day now commencing would not be like those that had preceded it. There were moments when I fancied that some circumstances which I did not remember had made me pass the night away from Marguerite; but that, if I returned to Bougival, I should find her as uneasy in her mind as I had been, and that she would ask me what had kept me away from her.

When a man has once become accustomed to a love like hers, it seems impossible that this habit can be broken without breaking at the same time all the other mainsprings of life.

I was therefore compelled, from time to time, to read over Marguerite's letter to convince myself that I had not been dreaming.

Giving way beneath the moral shock, I was incapable of any movement. My anxiety, the walk during the night, and the morning's news, had exhausted me. My father took advantage of this complete prostration of my strength to ask me to leave Paris with him, and I pledged myself to do so.

I promised everything he wished. I was incapable of discussing anything, and, after what had just taken place, longed for a sincere affection to enable me to live.

I was only too happy that my father sympathized with me in my sorrows.

All that I remember is, that about five o'clock that

very day he and I started off in a post-chaise. Without saying anything to me, he had had my trunks packed, strapped behind the carriage, and carried me off.

I knew not what I did until we had left the town behind us, when the solitude of the road recalled to me the void of my heart.

Then I again shed tears.

My father was aware that words, even from him, would not console me, and he allowed me to weep without uttering a syllable, contenting himself at times with pressing my hand, as if to remind me that I was not without a friend.

At night I slept a little and was dreaming of Marguerite.

I suddenly awoke, and could not make out why I was in a carriage.

Then I remembered what had happened, and my head sank on my breast.

I dared not converse with my father, still fearing he might say to me:

"You see I was right when I told you that this woman could not love."

But he did not take advantage of his position, and we arrived at C—— without his having alluded to the event which had been the cause of my departure.

When I embraced my sister, I remembered what Marguerite's letter said about her; but I soon felt that, kind as she was, my sister could not make me forget my love.

The game season was not yet over, and as my father thought it might divert my thoughts, he arranged some shooting parties with his friends and neighbors. I accompanied them without any dislike, and without any enthusiasm; but with that sort of apathy which characterized all my actions since I left Paris.

We had beaters, and they gave me a certain place. I did not load my gun, but put it against a tree, and then buried myself in thought.

I looked at the clouds as they passed, allowed my thoughts to wander over the solitary plains, and from time to time heard myself called by some sportsman who was quite near, and held up a hare to show me.

None of these details escaped my father, who did not allow himself to be deceived by my apparent calmness. He well understood that, however dejected I might be now, there would some day or other be a terrible and perhaps dangerous reaction. He avoided even the appearance of consoling me, but did his utmost to divert my thoughts.

My sister was, of course, not acquainted with what had happened, and therefore could not understand why I, who formerly was so merry, had suddenly become so thoughtful and sad.

At times, surprised in the midst of my melancholy by the uneasy looks of my father, I held out my hand to him and clasped his, as if tacitly to ask his pardon for the pain I gave him in spite of myself.

A month passed, and then I could bear it no longer.

The remembrance of Marguerite continually haunted me. She could not have become suddenly indifferent to me, for I had too deeply loved this woman, and was still loving her too much. I had to love or to hate her. Above all, and whatever my feelings for her were, I felt I must see her again, and that immediately.

This desire haunted me perpetually, a proof that at length my will had resumed its former power in a body which had remained inert for so long a time.

It was not on a future day, in a month, in a week, that I felt I must see Marguerite; it was on the very next day after the idea had struck me. I told my father that I was

about to leave him on some business that called me to Paris, and that I would be back soon.

No doubt he guessed my motive for leaving, for he urged me to remain; but as he saw that I was very irritable, and that any delay might produce fatal consequences, he embraced me and begged me, almost with tears in his eyes, to come back soon.

I did not close my eyes all the time I travelled until I arrived in Paris.

I did not know what I was going to do when once I should be there; but above all I would have to find out what had become of Marguerite.

I went to my rooms to dress, and as the weather was fine, and as it was not yet too late, I walked to the Champs-Elysées.

In about half an hour I saw in the distance, from the "rond point" of the "Place de la Concorde," Marguerite's carriage appear.

She had got back her horses, and her carriage was the same she formerly had, but it was empty.

Scarcely had I observed her absence, when looking around me I saw Marguerite on foot, walking with a female friend whom I had never seen before.

On passing me she turned pale, and a nervous smile contracted her lips. As for me, my heart beat so violently that my breast heaved; but I contrived to appear cool and collected, and I coldly bowed to my former mistress, who almost immediately rejoined her carriage, which she entered, accompanied by her friend.

I knew Marguerite. Our sudden meeting must have upset her. No doubt, she had heard of my departure, and this made her no longer dread the consequences of her having broken with me; but when she saw I had returned, found herself face to face with me, and observed

how pale I looked, she perfectly understood that I had come back for some purpose, and would ask herself what I was going to do.

If I had found Marguerite unhappy, if I could have revenged myself by coming to her asistance, I might, perhaps, have pardoned her, and certainly would never have thought of doing her any harm; but I found her happy, at least in appearance; another man had given her all the comforts I could no longer give her; and hence her breaking with me was brought about by the lowest motives of self-interest. I was, therefore, humbled in my pride as well as in my love, and she would naturally have to suffer for what she had made me suffer.

I could not be indifferent to this woman's actions, hence my indifference would annoy her most; therefore, I had to pretend not to care for her, not only in her presence, but in that of others.

I endeavored to assume a smiling countenance, and went to Prudence.

The maid gave in my name, and begged me to wait a few minutes in the sitting-room.

Madame Duvernoy at length appeared, and took me into her boudoir. Just as I was sitting down, I heard the door of the sitting-room open, and a light step creak on the floor; a minute after the door of the landing was violently shut.

"Do I disturb you?" I asked Prudence.

"Not at all. Marguerite was here. When she heard your name she huried off, and has just gone."

"I frighten her then now."

"No; but she fears it would not be pleasant for you to see her again."

"Why not?" I said, making an effort to breathe freely, for my emotion was choking me; "the poor girl has left

me to get back her carriage, her horses and her diamonds. She was quite right, and I ought not to be angry with her. I met her to-day," I observed carelessly.

"Where?" asid Prudence, who looked at me and appeared to ask herself if this was really the same man whom she had formerly known so deeply in love.

"In the Champs-Elysées. She was with another very pretty woman. Who is she?"

"What did she look like?"

"She was fair, rather thin, and wore ringlets; she has blue eyes, and was very elegantly dressed."

"Oh! that is Olympe. She is really a very pretty girl."

"With whom does she live?"

"With no one; with every one."

"What is her address?"

"Rue Tronchet, No. 20. Ah! I see you want to make love to her."

"One does not know what may happen."

"And Marguerite?"

"If I were to tell you that I no longer think of her it would be a falsehood; but I am one of those men who care a good deal about the way in which a 'liaison' is broken off. Now, Marguerite dismissed me in such an off-hand fashion that I felt I was a great fool for having been so smitten with her; for I was really very much in love with that girl."

You can imagine how carelessly I endeavored to say these words, but my forehead was all in a perspiration.

"She loved you very much, you may be sure of that; and she loves you still. The proof of it is that after having met you to-day she directly came here to tell me she had seen you. When she arrived, she was trembling all over and almost fainting."

"Well, what did she say to you?"

"She told me that, no doubt, you would come and see me, and begged me to implore you to forgive her."

"I have forgiven her; you can tell her so. Marguerite is a very good girl, but still she is a demirep, and I might have expected what she has done. I am even very much obliged to her for the resolution she has taken, for now I ask myself what would have been the consequences of our living together. It was sheer madness."

"She will be very glad to hear that you have come to the conclusion that she was obliged to do what she has done. It was high time for you to leave her, my friend. That scoundrelly agent, to whom she intended to sell her furniture, went to all her creditors to find out how much she owed them; so they took fright, and they were going to sell her up in a couple of days."

"Is everything paid now?"

"Almost."

"And who found the money?"

"The Count de N——. Ah! my dear friend, some men are made on purpose for this sort of thing. To be brief: he gave her twenty thousand francs, but he achieved his object. He is aware that Marguerite does not love him, but that does not prevent him from being very kind to her. You know that he has already bought back her horses, redeemed her diamonds, and given her as much money as the Duke gave her. If Marguerite will live quietly he will remain a long time with her."

"What is she doing? Does she now live in Paris?"

"She would never return to Bougival after you left it. It was I who went to fetch her things, and yours, too; I have made a parcel of the latter, for which you can send here. Everything you left is in that parcel, except a small portfolio with your initials on it, which Marguerite

would take, and keeps in her room; but if you don't like to lose it, I will ask her to let you have it again."

"She can keep it," I stammered; for my heart was full, and I was almost crying when I thought of the village where we had been so happy, and also of Marguerite caring to keep a trifle which had belonged to me, and reminded her of me.

If she had come in just then I would have abandoned my idea of being revenged, and should have knelt at her feet.

"Let me also tell you," resumed Prudence, "that I have never seen her as she is now. She scarcely sleeps at all; she goes to every ball, and to every supper, and even gets intoxicated. Not very long ago, after a supper, she remained a whole week in bed, and when the doctor allowed her to get up, she began again her former way of living, at the risk of killing herself. Shall you go and see her?"

"What will be the use of that? I came to see you, because you always behaved very well to me, and because I knew you before I knew Marguerite. I owe it to you that I have been her lover, and I owe it to you that I am no longer so."

"To speak the truth, I have done my very best to induce her to leave you, and I think that, later on, you will not think the worse of me for it."

"I owe you a double debt of gratitude," I said, rising, for I felt disgusted with this woman, on perceiving that she believed all I told her.

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

I knew quite enough.

"When shall I see you again?"

"Soon. Adieu!"

"Adieu!"

Prudence saw me as far as the door, and I returned to

my rooms, with tears of rage in my eyes, and a feeling of revenge in my heart.

Marguerite was decidedly a creature like other women of her class; and that great love which she felt for me had not been able to withstand a craving to resume her former life, and the necessity of having a carriage and indulging in revelry.

Thus I argued with myself during my sleepless nights, whereas had I been as cool as I pretended to be, I should have seen in Marguerite's new and restless mode of living an attempt to silence within her a continuous thought, an incessant remembrance.

Unfortunately evil passions predominated, and I only sought for the means of torturing this poor creature.

Oh! man is very petty and vile when one of his shallow passions is offended.

This Olympe, with whom I had seen Marguerite, was evidently her friend, at any rate the woman with whom she most associated since her return to Paris. Olympe was about to give a ball, and as I supposed Marguerite would be there, I endeavored to get an invitation, in which I succeeded.

Painful emotions beset me when I arrived at the ball, which was then already very animated. People were dancing and even shouting; and in one of the quadrilles I perceived Marguerite dancing with the Count de N——, who seemed very proud of exhibiting her, and appeared to say:

"This woman belongs to me."

I stood with my back to the mantelpiece, just opposite Marguerite, and looked at her as she danced. Scarcely had she seen me when she became agitated; but I glanced at her carelessly, and made her a slight token of recognition with my hand.

When I thought that after the ball she would no longer go home with me, but with that wealthy imbecile; when I represented to myself what would most likely follow, the blood rushed to my head, and I felt a craving to disturb their amours.

After the quadrille, I went to pay my respects to the mistress of the house, who displayed before her guests a pair of magnificent shoulders, and half of a finely developed bosom.

That girl was beautiful, and her figure was more plastically handsome than Marguerite's. I discovered this from certain looks which the latter cast on Olympe whilst I was conversing with her. Any man who became the lover of such a woman might be as proud of her as Monsieur de N—— was of his mistress; and she was beautiful enough to inspire a passion such as Marguerite had inspired in me.

She was without a lover at that time, and it would not be difficult to fill this place. The one thing needful was to offer her gold enough.

I began to pay my court to Olympe by dancing with her.

Half an hour later, Marguerite, pale as death, put on her cloak and left the ball-room.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THIS was already something, but it was not enough. I felt the power I had over this woman, and I took a cowardly advantage of it.

When I reflect that she is now dead, I ask myself if Heaven will ever pardon me the harm I have done her.

After supper, which was very noisy, play commenced.

I sat down next to Olympe, and staked my money so boldly that she could not help remarking it. In a very short time I had won from one hundred and fifty to two hundred louis, which I laid before me, and on which she gazed with ardent looks.

I was the only person whose mind was not wholly absorbed by gambling, and who paid her some attention. The whole night I continued to win, and it was I who gave her some money to play with, for she had lost all she had staked, and probably all that she possessed.

At five o'clock in the morning the party broke up.

I had won three hundred louis.

All the gamblers had already gone downstairs; I alone remained behind without being noticed, for I was not intimate with any of these gentlemen.

Olympe herself showed me a light, and I was about to leave as the others had done, when, turning back, I said:

"I want to speak to you."

"Call to-morrow," she replied.

"No, now."

"What can you have to say to me?"

"You will soon find out."

And I re-entered her room.

"You have lost a good deal of money," I remarked.

"Yes."

"All you had in the house."

She hesitated.

"Be frank."

"Well, it is true."

"I have won three hundred louis which are yours if you will keep me here."

Whilst saying these words I threw the gold on the table.

"Why do you make me this proposal?"

"Because I love you."

"No, but because you are in love with Marguerite, and wish to be revenged on her by becoming my lover. You cannot deceive a woman like me, my dear fellow. Unfortunately I am still too young and too pretty to play the part you propose."

"So you refuse?"

"Yes."

"Perhaps you would prefer me to love you for nothing, but I could not accept that. Reflect, my dear Olympe; I might have sent some other person to offer you these three hundred louis in my name, and then you would have accepted them, and my conditions as well; but I chose to treat directly with you. Accept, without trying to discover any reasons for my acting thus; and say to yourself that you are beautiful, and that there is nothing astonishing in my falling in love with you."

Marguerite was a courtesan like Olympe, yet I should never have dared to say to her, when I saw her for the first time, what I had just said to this woman. For I loved Marguerite; I had divined in her some traits of character which were wanting in this other creature, who, though she was very beautiful, disgusted me the very

moment I proposed, and was about to conclude the bargain.

She accepted, of course, and at noon the next day I left her rooms as her lover; but I quitted her couch without carrying away with me the remembrance of the caresses and expressions of affection which she had thought obliged to lavish on me for the six thousand francs I had given her.

And yet there were men who had ruined themselves for this woman!

From this day I subjected Marguerite to one continuous persecution. She and Olympe ceased to visit each other; and you can easily imagine why. I gave my new mistress a carriage and jewelry; I gambled; in fact I committed all the follies which a man in love with such a woman as Olympe would be likely to commit. The news that I had again fallen in love soon spread about.

Prudence herself was misled, and thought that I had completely forgotten Marguerite. The latter, whether she had divined my motive, or was deceived like others, remained outwardly very dignified, though I offended her every day. But she seemed to suffer, for whenever I met her, I always found her looking paler and more sad. My love for her, exalted to such a degree that it seemed turned to hatred, rejoiced at the sight of her daily recurring pangs. Many a time, under circumstances in which I displayed infamous cruelty, Marguerite looked at me so entreatingly, that I blushed at the part I was playing, and was ready to ask her pardon.

But this repentance only lasted as long as a flash of lightning, and Olympe, who had abandoned all pretense of being loved for her own sake, and felt that by hurting Marguerite she would obtain from me all she wished, constantly excited me against her, and insulted her every time she found an opportunity, with the obstinate cowardice of a woman encouraged by a man.

Marguerite, at length, no longer went to a ball nor to a theatre lest she should meet Olympe and myself. Then anonymous letters succeeded to direct insults; and there was not a disgraceful action I did not induce my mistress to attribute to Marguerite, and which I myself did not attribute to her.

I must have been mad to have done such things; I was like a man who, having got intoxicated on bad wine, is suffering from one of those nervous attacks in which he can commit a crime without his being aware of it. Amidst all this, I suffered martyrdom. The calmness without disdain, the dignity without contempt, with which Marguerite replied to all my attacks, made her superior to myself in my own eyes, and irritated me still more against her.

One evening Olympe had gone I don't know where, and had met Marguerite, who, this time, did not spare the stupid girl who insulted her, so that the latter was compelled to give way. Olympe came back in a towering rage, and Marguerite was carried off in a swoon.

When Olympe saw me, she told me what had taken place, and that Marguerite, on seeing her alone, resolved to avenge herself on her for being my mistress; I ought, therefore, to write and tell her to respect the woman I loved, whether I were present or not.

I need not tell you that I consented, and that all the bitter, base, and cruel things I could think of were inserted in my letter, which I forwarded the same day to its address.

This time I felt certain that the attack was too strong for the unhappy girl to bear it silently.

I was quite sure that I should receive an answer, and, therefore, resolved not to stir out the whole day. About two o'clock some one rang the bell, and Prudence entered.

I endeavored to assume an indifferent air, and asked her to what I was indebted for the honor of her visit; but

Madame Duvernoy was not in a jovial mood, and in a tone which was really full of emotion, told me, that since my return to town, for nearly three weeks, I had never missed an opportunity of paining Marguerite, and that she was ill from it, and that last night's scene and my letter of this morning had driven her to her bed.

In short, Marguerite, without reproaching me, had sent her to ask me to cease my attacks, as she had neither any longer the moral or physical strength to bear them.

"Mademoiselle Gautier," I replied to Prudence, "had a perfect right to discard me; but I will never permit her to insult a woman I love, for no other reason but because this woman happens to be my mistress."

"My friend," said Prudence, "you are under the influence of a girl who has neither feelings nor intelligence; it is true that you are in love with her, but that is no reason why you should torture a woman who cannot defend herself."

"Let Mademoiselle Gautier send me her Count de N——, and then one man will meet another."

"You know that she will not do so; therefore, my dear Armand, leave her alone. If you could but see her, you would be ashamed of the way in which you behave towards her. She is pale, she coughs continually, and will now not last long."

And Prudence gave me her hand saying:

"Come and see her; your visit will make her very happy:"

"I do not wish to meet the Count de N——."

"He is never with her. She cannot bear him."

"If Marguerite wishes to see me, she knows where I live, and can come here; but as for me, I will never again call at the Rue d'Antin."

"Will you receive her kindly?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I am sure she will come."

"Let her come."

"Are you going out to-day?"

"I shall be at home the whole evening."

"I will tell her so."

And Prudence departed.

I did not even write to Olympe that I could not come to see her. I stood on no ceremony with that girl: I scarcely stayed once a week with her; but I believe she consoled herself for my neglect by visiting some actor of a certain theatre on the Boulevard.

I left my rooms to go and take dinner, and returned almost immediately. I had fires lighted everywhere, and dismissed Joseph for the evening.

I cannot describe to you the various impressions that agitated me whilst I was waiting for a whole hour; but about nine o'clock I heard the bell ring, and then my emotion became so intense that, on going to open the door, I was forced to lean against the wall, so as not to fall on the ground.

Luckily the ante-room was in partial darkness, so that the change of my features was less perceptible.

Marguerite entered.

She was dressed wholly in black, and wore a veil. I could scarcely see her face underneath the lace.

She went into my sitting-room and lifted her veil.

Her countenance was as white as marble.

"Here I am, Armand," she said; "you wished to see me, and I have come."

And lowering her head on her hands, she burst into tears.

I drew near her.

"What is the matter?" I asked in a voice full of emotion.

She clasped my hand without giving me an answer, for her tears still prevented her from saying anything; but some moments afterwards, when she was a little more collected, she said:

"You have done me a great deal of harm, Armand, but I never did you any."

"Never?" I replied, with a bitter smile.

"Never! Only circumstances compelled me to act as I did."

I do not know whether in the course of your life you have ever felt, or ever will feel, what I suffered at the sight of Marguerite.

The last time she had visited me at my rooms she was seated in the very place where she now sat; only since then she had become the mistress of another man; other kisses than mine had pressed those lips, which, in spite of myself, I longed to press; and yet I felt that I loved this woman as much, and perhaps more, than ever I had loved her.

Still it was difficult for me to lead the conversation on the subject of her visit. Marguerite, no doubt, understood this, for she resumed:

"I have come to weary you, Armand, for I have two things to ask of you: your pardon for what I did yesterday to Mademoiselle Olympe, and also to beg of you to cease attacking me, which, perhaps, you are still prepared to continue. I do not know if you intended it, but since your return you have done me so much harm that I am no longer able to bear one-quarter of the emotions I have borne until this morning. You will have pity on me; will you not? and you will acknowledge, that for a man whose heart is in the right place, there are nobler things to do than to revenge himself on a woman, as ill and as sad as I am.

There, feel my hand; I am all in a fever; I have left my bed to come and ask you, not to be my friend, but to leave me alone."

I took Marguerite's hand. It was burning hot, and the poor girl shivered, though she wore a velvet cloak.

I drew the chair on which she was sitting close to the fire, and replied:

"And can you not imagine what I must have suffered that night, when, after waiting at Bougival, I came to look for you in Paris, and only found there your letter, which nearly drove me mad?

"How could you deceive me thus, Marguerite—I, who loved you so much?"

"Let us not speak of that, Armand; I did not come to talk about it. I no longer wished to consider you as an enemy, that is all; and I wanted to clasp your hand once more. You have a young and pretty mistress, whom you love, so people say: be happy with her, and forget me."

"And you are happy, no doubt?"

"Do I look like a happy woman, Armand? Do not mock my grief. You ought to knew better than any one, why, and how deeply I feel it."

"It is your own fault if now you are unhappy, as you say you are, and if you speak the truth."

"No, my friend, circumstances were stronger than my will. I was swayed, not by my feelings as a demirep, as you seem to think, but by serious and necessary motives, which one day you will know, and which will make you pardon me."

"Why do you not tell me these motives to-day?"

"Because even in telling them a reconciliation between us would be impossible, and because they would probably separate you from persons from whom you should not be separated."

"Who are these persons?"

"I cannot give you their names."

"Then you tell me a lie."

Marguerite rose and went towards the door.

I could not witness this silent though expressive grief without being deeply moved; and inwardly compared this pale and weeping woman to the merry girl who had made fun of me at the "Opéra Comique."

"You shall not go," I said, placing myself before the door.

"Why not?"

"Because, in spite of what you have done to me, I still love you, and will keep you here."

"To drive me away to-morrow. No; it is impossible. Our lives are apart. Let us not strive again to unite them. You will despise me, perhaps, whereas now you can but hate me."

"No, Marguerite," I exclaimed, feeling all my love and all my desires returning on beholding this woman; "no, I will forget everything, and we shall be as happy as we promised ourselves to be."

Marguerite shook her head, as if she doubted that this could ever happen, and said:

"Am I not your slave, your dog? Do with me as you please. Take me; I am yours."

And taking off her cloak and hat, she threw them on the sofa, and hurriedly began to unfasten her dress; for by one of those reactions which occur in diseases like hers, the blood rushed from her heart to her head, and almost choked her.

Then she began to cough, and her cough was dry and hollow.

"Send some one to my coachman," she resumed, "and tell him to take back my carriage."

I myself went down to dismiss this man.

When I came back Marguerite was lying before the fire, and her teeth chattered with cold.

I took her in my arms, undressed her, without a movement on her part, and carried her as cold as ice to my bed.

I then sat down near her, and endeavored to warm her with my caresses. She did not say a word to me, but smiled.

The night we spent together was an extraordinary one! Marguerite's whole life seemed to have passed into the kisses with which she loaded me, and I loved her so much, that amidst the transports of my feverish passion I asked myself if it were not better to kill her, so that she might never belong to another.

If a man were to pass a month amidst such a passion he would become a corpse, physically as well as mentally.

Daylight found us both awake.

Marguerite was livid. She did not utter a word. Big tears coursed at intervals from her eyes, and rested on her cheeks, as brilliant as diamonds. Her inert arms, from time to time, attempted to clasp me, and then fell powerless on the bed.

For a moment I thought I could forget what had happened since my departure from Bougival, and I said to Marguerite:

"Shall we go away and leave Paris?".

"No, no," she said, almost with terror; "we should be too unhappy. I can no longer contribute to your happiness; but as long as breath remains in me, I will be the slave of your caprices. At whatever hour of the day or night you may wish for me, come and I shall be yours; but do not unite again your lot to mine. You would be too unhappy, and make me too wretched.

"I expect to remain pretty for some time yet; make the most of it, but ask me for nothing more."

She went away, and I felt terrified by the solitude around me. Two hours after her departure I was still seated on the bed she had left, looking at the pillow that retained the impression of her head, and asking myself what my future would be between my love and my jealousy.

At five o'clock, without even knowing why I called, I went to the Rue d'Antin.

Nanine opened the door.

"My mistress cannot receive you," she said, with some embarrassment.

"Why not?"

"Because the Count de N—— is with her, and I have orders to allow no one to enter."

"That's quite right," I stammered; "I had forgotten."

I returned home like a man intoxicated. Do you know what I did during that moment of jealous madness, which lasted, however, long enough for me to commit an action of which I feel heartily ashamed? Do you know what I did? I said to myself that this woman had been making a fool of me; and I represented her to myself alone with the Count, repeating the same words she had uttered to me during the night. Then, taking a bank-note of five-hundred francs, I sent it to her with the following words:

"You left so hurriedly this morning that I forgot to pay you.

"I enclose your remuneration for last night."

When that letter had gone, I went out as if to escape from the remorse I instantly felt at having committed such an infamous deed.

I went to Olympe's rooms, whom I found trying on some

dresses, and who, when we were alone, sang some indecent songs to divert my thoughts.

That girl was undoubtedly, for me at least, the type of a courtesan without shame, without feelings, and without intelligence; and yet perhaps some man had dreamt to pass with her the same life I had hoped to spend with Marguerite.

She asked me for money, which I gave her; and then, free to depart, I returned home.

Marguerite had not replied.

You can understand in what agitation I passed the rest of the day.

At half-past six a commissionaire brought me an envelope containing my letter, and the five hundred franc note, without a single word.

"Who gave you this?" I asked the man.

"A lady who was leaving with her maid in the Boulogne stage-coach, and who told me not to take it to you till the coach had gone."

I hastened to Marguerite's house.

"Mademoiselle Gautier went to England this evening at six o'clock," said the "portier."

There was nothing to detain me any longer in Paris, neither love nor hatred. I was completely worn out by these various emotions. One of my friends was about to set out for the East, and I told my father that I should like to accompany him. He gave me money, some letters of introduction, and eight or ten days afterwards I took ship at Marseilles.

From an attaché of the embassy in Alexandria, whom I occasionally met at Marguerite's house, I heard that the poor girl was very ill.

I then wrote the letter to which she sent the reply you have read, and which I received at Toulon.

I started immediately for Paris, and you know the rest.

It now remains for you to read the few pages Julie Duprat gave me, and which are indispensable to complete the story I have told you.

CHAPTER XXV.

ARMAND, fatigued with this long story, often interrupted by his tears, handed to me the diary Marguerite had written; and then placed his hands on his forehead and closed his eyes, either to think or to endeavor to sleep.

A few moments afterwards Armand's breathing became a little more rapid than usual, which convinced me that he was asleep, but so lightly that the least noise might wake him.

I read what follows, and I have copied it without adding or effacing one word:

"To-day is the 15th of December. I have been suffering for the last three or four days. This morning I took to my bed. The weather is gloomy and I am sad. No one is near; and I am thinking of you, Armand. Where are you at the moment I am writing these lines? Far from Paris, very far, so I have heard, and perhaps you have already forgotten Marguerite. However, may you be happy, you to whom I owe the only happy moments of my life!

"I could not withstand the desire of giving you an explanation of my conduct, and I had written you a letter; but such a letter, written by a girl like me, might be regarded as a falsehood, unless death should put its seal on it, so that instead of a letter it would become a confession.

"I am ill to-day; I may die of this illness; for I have always had a presentiment that I should die young. My

mother died of consumption, and the manner in which I have lived until now could but increase the disease, the only inheritance that was left me; but I will not die without letting you know the truth about my conduct, if indeed when you return you still care for the poor girl whom you loved before your departure.

"The letter I intended to send to you was as follows, and I am glad to write it again as it gives me fresh proofs to exculpate myself:

"You remember, Armand, how astonished we were at Bougival when we heard that your father was in Paris; you may recall how I could not help feeling terrified at the news of his arrival, and also at what took place between you and him, for you told it to me that same evening.

"The next day you went to Paris, and whilst you were waiting for your father, who did not return, some messenger called at the cottage, and gave me a letter from Monsieur Duval.

"That letter, which I enclose, begged me in the most earnest manner to find some excuse or other to send you out of the way the next day, and to receive your father, who wished to speak to me. Above all, he recommended me not to mention his request to you.

"You may remember that when you came home I advised and urged you to go to Paris the next day.

"You were scarcely gone an hour, when your father presented himself. I will spare you the impression which his stern countenance produced on me. Your father was imbued with the old opinions that every courtesan is a being without any feelings and without common sense; a kind of machine for taking gold, always ready, like iron machines, to crush the hand that feeds it, and to destroy mercilessly, and without discernment, the man who keeps it going and sets it in motion.

"Your father had written me an unexceptionable letter asking me to receive him; but he did not present himself in quite as nice a manner as he had written. The first words he uttered were so haughty, so impertinent, and so threatening, that I gave him to understand I was in my own house, and that I was under no obligation to account to him for my manner of living, but for the sincere affection I felt for his son.

"Monsieur Duval calmed down a little, but nevertheless told me that he could no longer permit his son to ruin himself and me; that I was undeniably very handsome, but that, however handsome I might be, I ought not to make use of my beauty to destroy the future of a young man by my extravagant way of living.

"To this you will admit that there was but one answer to make, and this was to prove to him, that since I had been your mistress, no sacrifice on my part had been too great to remain faithful to you without asking you for more money than you could afford to give me. I showed him my pawn-tickets, the receipts of the persons to whom I had sold those articles which I had been unable to pledge; I told your father of my resolution to get rid of my furniture to pay my debts, and to live with you without becoming too heavy a burden on you; I recounted to him our happiness, the vista you had opened up for me of a more tranquil and happy life, and he finally became convinced, shook hands with me, and asked my pardon for the way in which he had at first addressed me.

"He then said to me:

"'Then, Madame, it is no longer by expostulations and threats, but by entreaties, that I shall endeavor to obtain from you a sacrifice greater than all those you have hitherto made for my son.'

"I trembled when I heard him speak thus.

"Your father drew near to me, took both my hands into his, and continued in an affectionate tone:

"'My child, do not misunderstand what I am about to say to you. We sometimes are obliged to do certain things in this life which wound our feelings, but to which we have to submit. You are kind-hearted and so disinterested that many women—who perhaps despise you, and are not half as good as you are—cannot understand you. But reflect that besides the mistress, there exist family ties; that besides love, there are duties; that an age when passion sways us is succeeded by an age when a man, to be respected, needs to have firmly established himself in a good position. My son has no fortune and yet he is ready to abandon to you the inheritance which his mother left him. If he accepted the sacrifice which you are about to make for him, he would neither be an honorable man, nor a gentleman, if he did not reward you for what you gave up for him, and if he did not make for you that provision which would forever place you in comparatively comfortable circumstances. But he cannot accept your sacrifice because the world, which does not know you, would attribute a dishonest motive to his accepting it, and such an accusation ought not to sully the name we bear. It will not consider if Armand loves you, or if you love him, or if this mutual love is a happiness for him and a rehabilitation for yourself; it will see but one thing, namely, that Armand allows a demirep—pardon me, my child, for what I am compelled to say—to sell for his sake all she possesses. Moreover, you may be sure there will come a day when reproaches and regrets will be interchanged, for such a day has come to other women; and both of you will bear fetters you are unable to break. What will you do then? Your youth will be gone, the future of my son will be de-

stroyed, and I, his father, shall only be comforted by one child instead of two.

"'You are young, you are handsome; there is consolation for you in the future; you are noble-minded, and the remembrance of a good action will redeem many a past deed. During the six months Armand has known you, he has forgotten me. Four times I wrote to him without his once replying; I might even have died without his knowing it."

"You may be resolved to lead another life than the one you have hitherto led; but Armand, who loves you, will not consent to the seclusion to which his small fortune condemns you, and in which it was never intended to conceal your beauty. Who knows what he will do then? I am aware that he gambled without mentioning it to you; I know that he does so still; he might, in a moment of madness, have lost part of the sum I have laid by for many years to give a dowry to my daughter, to leave something to himself, and to insure the tranquillity of my old age. What might have happened may happen still.

"'Moreover, are you certain that the life you abandon for his sake will not again attract you? Are you certain, you who have loved him, that you will never love another? and, finally, will you not feel that your 'liaison' has been an obstacle in the career of your lover, for which, perhaps, you will be unable to console him, if with increasing age a feeling of ambition succeeds to dreams of love? Reflect on all this, Madame. You love Armand; prove it by the only means that still remains to you, by sacrificing your love to his future. No harm is done as yet, but harm may come, and perhaps more serious than what I foresee. Armand may become jealous of a man who has loved you, and may challenge him; perhaps he will fight a duel and be killed; think what you would suffer then at the sight

of a father who would call you to account for his son's life.

"'Lastly, my child, I must tell you everything, for I have not done so yet; the chief reason of my coming to Paris is that my daughter, whom I mentioned before, and who is young, handsome, and as pure as an angel, is in love; she also made of this love the dream of her life. I wrote this to Armand, but, as he was wholly occupied with you, he did not answer me. Well, my daughter is about to be married to the man she loves, and to become a member of a respectable family, who expects mine to be the same. The parents of my future son-in-law have heard how Armand is living in Paris, and they have informed me that this marriage cannot take place if my son continues his present mode of life. The future of a girl who has done nothing to you, and who has a right to reckon that there is a future before her, is in your hands.

"'Have you the right, and do you feel yourself strong enough to destroy that future? In the name of your repentance, Marguerite, grant me the happiness of my daughter.'

"I wept silently, my friend, when I listened to all these observations, which I very often had made to myself, and which, in the mouth of your father, sounded more earnest and true. I said to myself what your father did not like to tell me, though it had risen a score of times to his lips, that, after all, I was only a demirep and that whatever reason I might give for our 'liaison,' it would always look as if my motives were self-interested; that my past life gave me no right to hope for such a future, and that I had accepted responsibilities for which my habits and my reputation gave no guarantee whatever. In short, I loved you, Armand. The paternal way in which Monsieur Duval spoke to me; the chaste feeling which he called up in me;

the esteem in which this grand old man was likely to hold me, and yours which I was certain of obtaining later, all this awoke in my heart noble thoughts which exalted me in my own eyes, and aroused within me a blessed pride such as I had never known before. When I thought that some day this old man, who was imploring me not to thwart the future of his son, would tell his daughter to remember me in her prayers, as a mysterious friend, I became transformed and proud of myself.

"The exaltation of the moment exaggerated perhaps the truth of these impressions; but that is what I felt, my friend, and these new feelings silenced the thoughts inspired by the recollection of the happy days passed with you.

"'I have listened to you, sir,' I replied to your father, drying my tears. 'Do you believe I love your son?'

"'Yes,' answered Monsieur Duval.

"'That my love is unselfish?'

"'Yes.'

"'Do you believe that I thought this love would have been the hope, the dream, and the redemption of my life?'

"'I am certain you thought so.'

"'Well, sir, embrace me once as you would your daughter, and I swear to you that such a kiss, the only chaste kiss I have ever received, will enable me to withstand my own feelings, and that before a week is over your son will have returned to you, perhaps unhappy for some time, but cured forever.'

"'You are magnanimous,' replied your father, kissing me on the forehead, 'and Heaven will reward you for your attempt; but I fear you will not succeed with my son.'

"'Do not make yourself uneasy, sir, he will hate me.'

"An impassable barrier had to be raised between you and me.

"I wrote to Prudence that I accepted the proposals of the Count de N——, and told her to let him know that I would take supper with him and her.

"I sealed the letter, and without telling your father its contents, I asked him to have it delivered on his arrival in town.

"He, nevertheless, asked me what I had written.

"'Something that concerns your son's happiness,' I replied.

"Your father embraced me for the last time, and shed some tears of gratitude, which trickled on my brow, and were like a redemption of my past faults. At the very moment I consented to give myself to another man, I felt quite proud to think what I was redeeming by committing this new sin.

"That was quite natural, Armand, for you had told me that your father was the most honest man in the world.

"Monsieur Duval re-entered his carriage and departed.

"Nevertheless, woman-like, when I saw you again I could not refrain shedding tears, but did not falter.

"Have I done right? That is what I ask myself now whilst I am lying on a bed of sickness, which perhaps I shall never leave alive.

"You remember what I suffered when the hour for our inevitable separation drew near; your father was no longer there to support me, and there was a moment when I was very near telling you everything, so horrified was I at the idea that you were about to hate and despise me.

"One thing which you will perhaps not believe, Armand, is that I prayed to Heaven to give me strength, and the proof that my sacrifice was accepted is that the strength for which I prayed was granted me.

"At that supper I still required assistance, for I did

not dare to reflect on what I was going to do, and I feared that my courage would fail me.

"Who would have thought that I, Marguerite Gautier, would have suffered so much at the mere thought of taking a new lover?

"I drank a good deal in order to drown memory, and when I awoke the next day I found myself in bed with the Count.

"This is the whole truth, my friend: judge and pardon me, as I have pardoned you all the harm you have done me since that day."

CHAPTER XXVI.

"You know as well as I what happened after that fatal night, but what you do not know and cannot have any suspicion of, is what I have suffered since our separation.

"I heard that your father had carried you off, but I was convinced that you could not stay away from me for any length of time, and the day I met you in the Champs-Elysées I felt agitated but was not astonished.

"Then you commenced each day to heap a fresh insult on me; and I almost felt glad on receiving those insults, for they proved that you still loved me, whilst it also appeared to me that the more you persecuted me the higher I should be raised in your estimation when one day you would know the whole truth.

"Do not be astonished, Armand, that I suffered this martyrdom cheerfully, for the love you once felt for me had inspired me with a noble enthusiasm.

"However, I did not feel so strong-minded all at once.

"After I had sacrificed myself some time elapsed before you returned, and meanwhile I had recourse to physical excitement to prevent me from becoming mad, and to harden myself for the life I had again entered upon. Prudence, no doubt, has told you that I was present at every fête, at every ball, and at every orgy.

"I hoped to kill myself rapidly by these excesses, and I believe that this expectation will ere long be realized. My health became naturally worse, and the very day I sent Madame Duvernoy to you to ask your pardon I was exhausted, both bodily and mentally.

"I will not remind you, Armand, how you repaid me for the last proof of affection I gave you, neither of the outrage which drove from Paris a woman who, though dying, had not been able to resist your entreaty when you asked her to love you for a night, and who, like an insane woman, believed for an instant that she could reunite the past and the present. You had a right to behave as you did, Armand; people have not always paid me as much for a night!

"I abandoned everything then! Olympe took my place with the Count de N——, and I believe she undertook to let me know the motive of my departure. The Count de G—— was in London. He is one of those men who think that a 'liaison' with girls like myself has just importance enough to enable them to pass their time agreeably, who remain always the friends of the woman they have known, and do not hate them, as they have never been jealous of them. He is, in fact, one of those noblemen of high rank who open to us only part of their heart, but the whole of their cash-box. I thought of him directly, and went to him. He received me kindly; but on the other side of the water he was the lover of a lady in society, and afraid of compromising himself by appearing in public with me. He introduced me to his friends, and they gave me a supper, after which one of them took me home with him.

"What else could I have done, my friend?

"Kill myself? If I had done so your life, which ought to be a happy one, would have been burdened by useless remorse. Moreover, what is the use of killing one's self when death is so near?

"I became a body without a soul, a thing without thought. I led for some time a mechanical life; then I returned to Paris and inquired after you; they told me that you had gone for a long voyage. Nothing kept me up any longer.

My existence again became what it was two years before I knew you. I tried to get back the Duke, but I had wounded his pride too deeply, and old men are not patient; doubtless because they perceive that they do not last forever. Day by day I grew worse; I was pale, sad, and became still thinner. Those men who buy love examine the merchandise before delivery, and as there were in Paris women in better health and stouter than I was, people forgot me more or less. This was my past up till yesterday.

"Now I am quite ill. I have written to the Duke to ask him for some money, for I have none, and my creditors keep calling and are continually sending in their bills without any mercy. Will the Duke answer me? Why are you not in Paris, Armand? You would come to see me, and your visit would console me."

"December 20th.

"It is horrible weather. It snows. I am at home alone. For the last three days I have had such an attack of fever that I was not able to write a single word to you. There is no news, my friend. Each day I vaguely hope to receive a letter from you, but none has come, and perhaps never will come. Only men possess sufficient strength of mind not to pardon. The Duke has not answered me.

"Prudence has recommenced her journeys to the pawnbrokers.

"I continually spit blood. Oh! you would be pained if you were to see me. You are very fortunate to dwell amidst sunny skies, and not to have an icy winter weighing on your chest, as I have. To-day I got up for a short time, and from behind my window curtains beheld that Parisian life with which I think I have broken forever. A few acquaintances

passed quickly along the street with cheerful and quite indifferent looks, and not one raised his eyes to my windows. However, a few young men called to inquire after me. Once before I was ill; and then you, who did not know me, and to whom I had been very impertinent the very first time I saw you, came every morning to inquire how I was. Now I am ill again. During the six months we were together, I felt for you as much love as the heart of a woman can contain and bestow; and now you are far away, heaping curses on me, and not a word of consolation have I received from you. I am certain that it is only by accident you forsake me, for if you were in Paris you would not leave my bedside nor my room."

"December 25th.

"My doctor forbids me to write every day. In fact, thinking only increases my illness; but yesterday I received a letter which has done me some good, more from the feelings which it expressed than for the assistance which it brought. I can, therefore, write to you to-day. This letter was sent to me by your father, and is as follows:

"'Madame,

"'I have just learned that you are ill. If I were in Paris I would myself call on you. If my son were here, I would tell him to go and call on you, but I cannot leave C——, and Armand is six or seven hundred miles away. Permit me, therefore, Madame, to write to you to tell you how sorry I am to hear of your illness, and to express a sincere wish for your prompt recovery.

"'One of my intimate friends, Monsieur H——, will come to see you, and I beg you will be good enough to re-

ceive him. I have asked him to be the bearer of a message of which I impatiently wait the result.

"'Accept, Madame, the assurance of my most distinguished sentiments.'

"This was the letter I received. Your father is magnanimous. Love him with all your heart, Armand, for there are few men in the world so worthy of being beloved. His handwriting has done me more good than all the remedies of my eminent physician.

"This morning Monsieur H—— called, and appeared to labor under some embarrassment in delivering the difficult message of which he was the bearer. He came simply to bring me five thousand francs which your father sent me. At first I wished to refuse, but Monsieur H—— told me that this refusal would offend Monsieur Duval, who had authorized him to give me this sum for my present wants and to supply me with all I might want afterwards. I accepted this service, which, coming from your father, I could not consider as alms. If I am dead when you return, show your father what I have written about him, and tell him that in penning these lines the poor girl to whom he was kind enough to write such a consoling letter shed tears of gratitude, and has prayed Heaven to bless him."

"January 4th.

"I have just passed several very painful days. I did not know that physically one could suffer so much. Oh! my past life! I am now paying doubly the penalty for it.

"People have been taking care of me every night. I could scarcely breathe. I have been coughing nearly the

whole time of my wretched existence, and when not coughing was partly delirious.

"My dining-room is full of 'bonbons' and presents of all kinds which my friends have brought me. Among these there are no doubt some men who hope that I may become their mistress later on. If they could but see how illness has changed me, they would flee from me quite horrified.

"Prudence gives away as her New-Year gifts the presents that were sent to me.

"The weather is frosty, and the doctor tells me I may go out in a few days if it continues fine."

"January 8th.

"I drove out yesterday in my carriage. The weather was magnificent; the Champs-Elysées were crowded. It seemed like the first smile of spring. Everything around me had a holiday appearance. I never imagined that an hour of sunshine could bring as much joy, pleasure, and consolation as I discovered in it yesterday.

"I met nearly all my acquaintances as merry as usual, and caring for nothing but to be amused. How many people are happy and know it not! Olympe passed me in an elegant carriage which Monsieur de N—— had given her. She attempted to insult me by her looks, but does not know that I no longer care for such vanities. A good-natured young fellow whom I have known for a long time asked me if I would come and have some supper with him and one of his friends, who, he said, was very anxious to make my acquaintance.

"I could but smile sadly, and held out to him my hand burning with fever.

"I never saw a countenance express more astonishment than his.

"I came home at four o'clock and dined with some appetite.

"The drive has done me good.

"If I were to recover!

"How the sight of life and happiness in others inspires with a desire to live those who, the day before, felt quite lonely and oppressed by the gloominess of the sick-room, and who hoped to die soon!"

"January 10th.

"My expectation that I might recover has not been realized. I am once more in my bed, and wholly covered with plasters that burn me. I am sure that if I were now to offer this body, which at one time was appraised so highly, I would not get much for it!

"Either we must have done a great deal of harm before we were born, or we are to enjoy great happiness after our death; for Heaven permits us to suffer in this existence all the tortures of expiation, and all the pangs of an ordeal."

"January 12th.

"I continue to suffer.

"Count de N—— sent me some money yesterday, but I refused to take it. I want nothing from that man. If it were not for him you would now be with me.

"Oh! where are now our happy days of Bougival?

"If ever I should leave this room alive, I will make a

pilgrimage to the house where we lived together; but I shall never leave it except as a corpse.

"Who knows if I shall be able to write to you to-morrow?"

"January 25th.

"I have not closed my eyes these eleven nights; I almost was suffocated, and thought every moment I was about to die. The doctor will not let me touch a pen; but Julie Duprat, who is with me, still allows me to write you these few lines. Will you not return before I die? Is everything forever ended between us? It seems to me that if I were to see you I should recover. But what would be the use of my recovering?"

"January 28th.

"A loud noise awoke me this morning. Julie, who slept in my room, rushed into the dining-room. I heard some men's voices, and then hers remonstrating in vain. She returned weeping.

"These men came to seize my furniture. I told her to allow what is called justice to take its course. A sheriff's officer entered my room without taking off his hat, pulled open every drawer, made an inventory of everything he could see, and did not appear to observe that there was a dying woman in bed, which fortunately the mercy of the law does not allow to be taken.

"He condescended to say, as he went away, that I could enter an opposition within nine days, but he left a man in possession. Good Heavens! what is to become of

me? This scene has made me worse. Prudence wanted to ask your father's friend for some money, but I would not allow it."

"I received this morning your letter, for which I had been wishing. Will my reply reach you in time? Shall I ever see you again? This happy day makes me forget all that has happened during the last six weeks. I seem to be better, in spite of the sadness I felt when I wrote to you.

"After all, we cannot always be unhappy.

"I think it is just possible that I may not die, that you will return, that I shall once more see the spring, that you may again love me, and that we may recommence our life of the past year!

"How foolish I am! I can hardly hold the pen with which I write to you this senseless dream, inspired by my affection for you.

"Whatever may happen, Armand, I did love you dearly, and should have died long since had I not been strengthened by the remembrance of our love, and by a vague expectation of seeing you once more at my side."

"February 4th.

"The Count de G—— has returned. His mistress has been unfaithful to him. He is very sad, for he was very fond of her, and came to tell this misfortune to me. The poor fellow is in very bad circumstances; but this did not prevent him from paying the sheriff's officer, and dismissing the man in possession.

"I spoke to him of you, and he promised to let you

know all about me. I forgot at the moment that I had ever been his mistress, and he also tried to make me forget it. He is very good to me.

"The Duke sent yesterday to know how I was, and called this morning himself. I cannot understand how this old man is still alive. He stopped three hours with me, and did not utter a score of words, but shed tears when he saw me looking so pale. The remembrance of his daughter's death affected him no doubt. He will have seen her die twice. He is stooping very much, his head reclines on his chest, his lower lip droops, and his eyes are dim. Age and grief bear down heavily on his worn-out frame. He did not utter a single reproach. It would almost seem as if he were inwardly gratified by the progress of my illness. He appeared proud to be yet alive, when I, still so young, was worn out by suffering.

"The bad weather has returned, and no one comes to see me. Julie stays with me as much as she can. Prudence, to whom I can no longer give as much money as formerly, begins to find excuses for staying away.

"Now that I am about to die, in spite of what the doctors say, for I have several, and it is a proof that I am getting worse, I almost regret having acted as your father wished. Had I known that I should only have taken one year of your life, I would not have refrained from passing that year with you, and would have died clasping at least the hand of a friend. But if we had been together for a year I should not have died so soon.

"Heaven's will be done!"

"February 5th.

"Oh come, come, Armand! I suffer horribly! Great Heavens, I am about to die! I was so sad yesterday that

I wished to spend anywhere but at home the evening, which threatened to be as long as the preceding one. The Duke came in the morning; but it seems that the sight of this old man, whom death has forgotten, will make me die sooner.

"In spite of the violent fever which consumes me, I dressed and drove to the 'Vaudeville Theatre.' Julie put some rouge on my cheeks, or I should have looked like a corpse. I went to the very box where I told you to meet me for the first time, and I kept, all the while, my eyes fixed on the stall which you occupied on that night, and in which was seated last evening some lout who laughed loudly at all the foolish things uttered by the actors. They took me home half dead. I coughed and spit blood all night. To-day I am no longer able to speak, and can hardly move my arms. Oh Heavens! I am about to die! I expect it, but I cannot reconcile myself to the idea of suffering more than I now suffer, and if. . . ."

The few words which Marguerite had attempted to write at the bottom of this letter were illegible, and it was Julie Duprat who wrote to me as follows:

"February 18th.

"Monsieur Armand,

"From the day Marguerite insisted on going to the theatre, she continued to grow worse. She entirely lost her voice and the use of her limbs. What our poor friend has suffered it is impossible to describe. I am not accustomed to such sad scenes, and every moment I dread the worst.

"How I wish you were with us. She is almost always delirious; but delirious or not, she always utters your name when she is unable to say anything else.

"The physician informs me that she cannot last long. The old Duke has not called again since she has been so very ill.

"He told the doctor that the sight was too painful for him.

"Madame Duvernoy does not behave well. This woman, who thought to obtain more money from Marguerite, at whose expense she almost entirely lived, has incurred some liabilities which she is unable to meet, and as she perceives that Mademoiselle Gautier can no longer be of use to her, she does not even take the trouble to come and see her. Everybody abandons her. Monsieur de G—— has been obliged to go back to London on account of his debts; but before leaving he sent her some money. He did all that he could; but the creditors have again put in an execution, and only wait her death to realize.

"I tried with the little money I had to stay these proceedings, but the sheriff's officer told me that it was useless, and that there were other judgments out against Marguerite. As she is about to die, it will be better to abandon everything than to try and save something for her family, whom she did not wish to see, and who never liked her. You cannot imagine the gilded misery amidst which the poor girl is dying. Yesterday we had no money at all. Plate, jewelry, cashmere shawls, everything is in pledge, and what remains is either sold or seized. Marguerite is still conscious of what is going on, and suffers mentally as well as bodily. Large tears roll down her cheeks, so thin and so pale that you would no longer recognize the countenance of her whom you loved so much, even if you could see her. She made me promise to write to you when she should no longer be able to do so, and I write in her presence; she looks towards me, but is unable to see me, for her sight is already dimmed by the approach of death, and

yet she smiles, and, I am certain, thinks and dreams only of you.

"Every time the door is opened her eyes brighten, and she always imagines that you will enter the room; but when she sees it is not you, her countenance resumes its expression of pain, is covered with a cold perspiration, and the cheeks become flushed."

"February 19, Midnight.

"This has been a very sad day, my dear Monsieur Armand. This morning Marguerite was almost choking. The doctor bled her, and she slightly recovered her voice. He advised her to see a priest. She made no objections, and he went himself to fetch an abbé from Saint-Roch.

"Meanwhile, Marguerite called me to her side, asked me to open her wardrobe, pointed to a cap and a long chemise trimmed with lace, and said in a feeble tone of voice:

"'I am going to die after having made my confession; then you will take those things and dress me in them, for I want to look nice even in death.'

"She then embraced me, crying, and added:

"'I can speak, but I am almost suffocated when I attempt it. I am choking, give me air!'

"My tears flowed freely; I opened the window, and a few minutes afterwards the priest entered.

"I went to meet him.

"When he knew in whose rooms he was he seemed to suppose he would not be well received.

"'Enter without fear, reverend sir,' I said.

"He remained but a short time in Marguerite's room, and when he left it, he said to me, 'She has led a sinful life, but she dies a Christian.'

"A few minutes afterwards he returned, accompanied by an acolyte carrying a crucifix, and preceded by a sacristan ringing a bell to announce that the sacrament was about to be administered to a dying person.

"They all three entered her bedroom, in which formerly had been uttered so many extraordinary words, and which was at this hour but a holy tabernacle.

"I knelt down. I do not know how long the impression may last which this scene has produced on me, but I do not believe that anything human will ever affect me thus before my final hour shall also have arrived.

"The priest anointed with consecrated oil the feet, the hands, and the forehead of the dying woman, uttered a short prayer, and Marguerite found herself prepared for that Heaven where she will doubtless go, as her trials in this world have been great, and as her death has sanctified her.

"Since then she has not uttered a word, and has not made a movement. Many a time I thought she was dead, but I still heard her breathe with difficulty."

"February 20th. Five o'clock in the evening.

"All is over.

"Marguerite's agony began about two o'clock this night. Never did martyr suffer such tortures, to judge from the cries she uttered. Twice or thrice she rose up in bed, as if she wished to cling to that life which was ascending Heavenward.

"Two or three times also she murmured your name; then everything was silent, and she fell down exhausted on her bed. She did not sob, and yet tears coursed down her cheeks; and thus she died.

"Then I approached and called her; but as she did not answer, I closed her eyes, and kissed her on the forehead.

"Poor dear Marguerite, I wish I had been a pious woman, so that this kiss might have recommended you to Providence.

"Then I dressed her as she had asked me to do. I went to Saint-Roch to fetch a priest; I lit two wax-tapers for her, and prayed for an hour in church.

"I distributed to the poor some money she had given me.

"I do not know much about religion, but I believe that Heaven will recognize that my tears were genuine, that my prayers rose from the heart, that my alms were freely bestowed, and that it will have mercy on a woman, who, dying young and lovely, had no one else but me to close her eyes and be present at her death."

"February 22d.

"To-day the funeral took place. A great many of Marguerite's female friends came to church, and some shed genuine tears. When the procession took the road to Montmartre, only two men followed the hearse, the Count de G——, who had returned from London on purpose, and the Duke, who walked supported by two footmen.

"It is from her rooms that I write you all these details, in the midst of my tears, and before a lamp which dimly lights up a dinner I cannot eat, as you may well believe, but which Nanine ordered, thinking I might require it, as I have eaten nothing for more than twenty-four hours.

"I cannot long retain these sad impressions, for my life does not belong to me any more than Marguerite's belonged to her. That is why I give you all these details

upon the very spot where she died, for fear that, if any length of time should elapse before you return, I might not be able to set them down for you in all their sad reality."

CHAPTER XXVII.

"HAVE you read it?" said Armand to me, after I had perused the manuscript.

"I can understand what you must have suffered, my friend, if all this be true."

"My father has confirmed the truth of it in a letter he wrote me."

We conversed for some time about the sad destiny of the girl whose life had just ended, and I went home to take a little rest.

Armand, still sad, but somewhat relieved by having told me this story, rapidly recovered, and we went together to pay a visit to Prudence and to Julie Duprat.

Prudence had just become a bankrupt. She informed us that Marguerite was the cause of it, as she had lent her a great deal of money during her illness, for which she herself had given bills which could not be met, as Marguerite had died without having repaid her, and had not given her any acknowledgment which would have enabled her to rank as a creditor.

By means of this falsehood, which Madame Duvernoy told everywhere as an excuse for having failed in business, she succeeded in getting a thousand francs from Armand, who did not believe her story, but who pretended to do so, so great was his respect for any one who had associated with his mistress.

Thence we went to Julie Duprat, who told us the sad

events which she had witnessed, and shed tears of sincere regret at the recollection of her departed friend.

Finally we visited Marguerite's grave, on which the early rays of an April sun caused the first leaves to appear.

There remained another duty for Armand to perform, namely, to go and visit his father. He still wished me to accompany him.

We arrived at C——, where I saw that Monsieur Duval was as tall, dignified, and kind-hearted as I imagined he would be, from the description his son had given of him.

He welcomed Armand with tears of happiness, and shook me by the hand. I soon perceived that his paternal feelings predominated over all others in his breast.

His daughter Blanche showed by her looks the purity of her mind, and smiled so serenely that it convinced me she could only foster pious thoughts and utter blessed words. She smiled when her brother returned, for the chaste young maiden was not aware that, far away, a courtesan had sacrificed her happiness on the mere invocation of her name.

I remained for some time amidst this happy family, wholly occupied with the son and brother who had come back to them in order to be cured.

I returned to Paris, where I write this history as it has been told to me. It has but one merit, which perhaps people will not admit, namely, that it has really happened.

It is not at all my intention to draw from this story the conclusion that girls of the same class as Marguerite are capable of doing what she did; but I know that one of them did really love, that she has suffered for it, and died through it. I have told the reader what was told me, and I consider this to have been my duty.